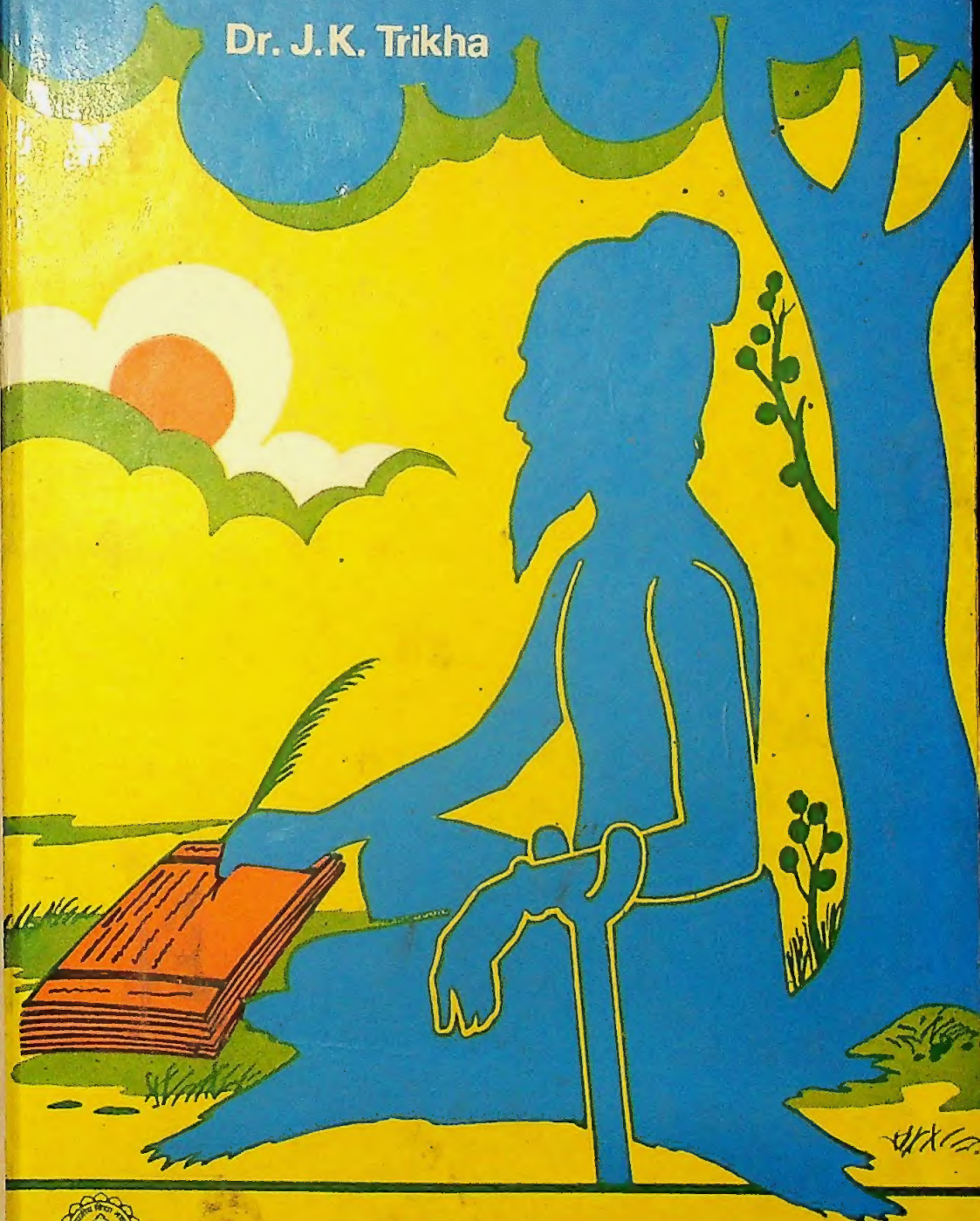


# A STUDY OF THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

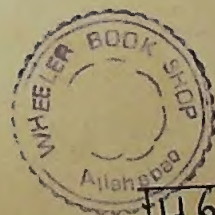
Dr. J.K. Trikha



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A STUDY OF  
THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI



# A Study of the Ramayana of Valmiki

DR. J. K. TRIKHA

FOREWORD

BY

SHRI JAISUKHLAL HATHI

*Governor of Punjab*



1981

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

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## FOREWORD

I have great pleasure in introducing this book *A Study of the Ramayana of Valmiki* by Dr. J. K. Trikha, M.A., Ph.D. Nothing more inspiring has been written by man than the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which contain India's message to man. The *Ramayana* represents the Vedic Dharma through the life story of the perfect man who would inspire generations of men through ages and would cherish truth and justice. The supreme example of sufferings for the sake of Dharma was narrated through the events in the life of the Rishis, whose mature wisdom guided the hero at every stage of his life. The story of Rama and Sita, born as mortals, experiencing human sorrow and establishing Dharma on earth is composed by Valmiki in words of matchless beauty. And Brahma's words have come true:

"As long as the mountains stand and the rivers flow,  
so long shall the *Ramayana* be cherished among men  
and women and save them from sin."

No scripture has been able to maintain such a freshness of appeal for Dharma as these epics have done. If great works of art in India remained religiously and spiritually motivated, the credit goes to the epics which were universally adored as the literature truly representative of the Vedas.

Dr. Trikha, by his deep study of the *Ramayana* by Valmiki, has dealt with this subject at great length. He has not merely narrated the story of Rama but has shown how these great epics speak of the soul and concept of a life after death, and how they have popularised vedic rituals, yogic cultivation and other virtues which the Vedas had eulogized in their epithets of gods and seers. Through the stories of great sages and rajarishis, the epics awakened in the rank and file of the Indian people a national zeal for a life of virtue, much before any other country received such moral ideas from prophets or poets.

In a very impressive but lucid style, the author has shown how the great task of moulding a people's life and raising the nation-



wide spiritual tone of society according to the vedic traditions has been successfully carried on for centuries by the epics. With this background, as one proceeds with the book, one gets a glimpse of the culture of the *Ramayana* period.

Valmiki, as the author has stated, evidently meant, when he declared his *Ramayana* to be a 'Veda-sammata' or in accordance with the vedic traditions and sanctions, that the culture, ideals, hopes and problems of the *Ramayana* age were part of a civilization which arose and flourished under inspiration from the Vedas. The people, of whom Valmiki wrote, were proud of the vedic sanctions for all that they thought and cherished, for it was the Veda that had bequeathed to them all that they were happy to claim as the glory of their race. Their religion, culture, institutions and traditions, as well as their metaphysics, sciences and literature were all born of the vedic lores. The society that Valmiki was depicting had intimate links with that ancient way of Aryan life in which the Vedas had infused purposes of values, unique in that age, when outside that society barbaric passions, demoniacal vanities and monstrous self-assertions, self-aggrandizements and self-gratifications were nourished by force of clan-feelings, arms, brute physical and diplomatic strength and even spiritual cults pursued for the sake of mere self-glorification. For maintaining an unbroken interest in the emotional appeal of values considered sacred in that vedic civilization, Valmiki charges every aim and pursuit in domestic and public life in that Aryan society with an illumining halo of reminiscences of vedic texts.

Rich in vedic values, Valmiki's theme, the author has shown, remains human with a concept of character in which golden and silvery virtues of truth, honour, chastity, duty and self-restraint illumine every trying moment and impending doom in the lives of men and women. Every character in this great book has a moral to give to the world—be it Dasharatha, an ideal father, Rama, an obedient son, Lakshmana and Bharata, affectionate brothers, Kausalya, a loving mother, Hanuman, a staunch devotee, Ravana, a formidable foe. It is equally rich in the play of passion as any great epic in the world. Kaikeyi's obstinacy, Dasharatha's helpless fury, Lakshmana's wrath, Sita's silent tears, Kausalya's deeper agonies and Bharata's touching concern over selfishness perpetrated in his own name, could give Ayodhya Kandam a worthy place



## FOREWORD

among any great tragedies, but the chief charm in this great work of art was sought to be created not through passion but through a variety of Rasas or sentiments, and Valmiki has maintained highest standards of these sentiments in his different books.

The author has critically analysed the literary merits of this great epic especially the Ayodhya Kanda. The author says—very correctly—that *Ramayana* is a perfect piece of art. Unity of the piece is worthy of a modern short story or a one-act play. There is only one action throughout this section of the poem, namely the action of Rama's coronation or, if one might choose to call it, a 'Non-coronation'.

In his critical study of Kishkindha Kanda, the author has dealt with the history and life of Vanaras. He has rightly described this Kanda as a living fossil containing a history of the cave-man till he was adopting more organised ways of life in colonies within and around forests, for which Valmiki calls these species as Vanaras. Their ways of life and their implements in the *Ramayana* show that these races were not connected with the Aryan race till after thousands of years of their existence in the South, the Aryan seers, as pioneers of civilization, brought vedic influences to bear upon their ways of living, and till Rama brought about a complete fusion of the different races in the South within the Aryan fold.

The author concludes his book with the last chapter "Divine Interference". Here, he shows how from the very beginning Valmiki had depicted Rama as the hero of the story — a perfect man — and how gradually this perfect man is being pointed out as God by gods and seers. Brahma, the Creator, Indra, the Chief of gods and above all, Maheshwara, the Supreme Divinity, come to point out the infinity in Rama's personality. Dasharatha's spirit too comes down from its heavenly abode to bless Rama, who has raised the status of man above gods.

At the time of the birth of Rama, Ravana was ruling Lanka. He had performed sacrifices in the vedic manner. His glorious empire in the South was a tribute to his penances or self-discipline. He had been granted boons by the Creator and he had propitiated Sankara. All this, in a quaint idiom, speaks of his virtuous life in the past, but as in every human being, power corrupts and that power had corrupted Ravana beyond recovery and he was bequeathing to society a more selfish way of life

than he himself had resorted to. His son, Indrajit, performed sacrifices for meaner purposes, and the author says, how Valmiki gives a significant symbol for all diabolical ideals that a backward society works for. Indrajit's ladle was made of black iron, his clothes were red and he offered oblations of blood and liquor.

Who could redeem such a society? Man had contributed to this long deterioration. Man, gifted with pure actions, intellect and vision alone could effect man's deliverance from this sloth and Rama was indeed the man in whom gods saw the 'Primaeval purpose of Creation.' The vedic idiom once more defines such a man who identifies himself with the entire creation. The description of the Purusha sums up all notions of the perfect man—Rama—and when in *Ramayana*, gods adore Rama as Vishnu or the Supreme Purusha, whose breath is the wind and whose eyes are the sun and moon, and ears are the Ashvinas or cavities of the firmament and the earth, Valmiki means to point out that the primaeval purpose of creation was embodied in Rama's personality. By revealing this divinity in Rama, Valmiki has indeed immortalized his poem, which is sung with devotion and reverence by millions of our countrymen.

*A Study of the Ramayana of Valmiki* unfolds the rich cultural heritage of our ancient land and inspires one to go deep into the rich treasure bequeathed to us by sages and seers. It reminds us of the past glory of our great land — once a land of the loftiest thought, purest ethics and noble traditions, a land of the Vedas and the Upanishads, a land of Yudhishtira and Krishna, a land of Rama and Sita, a land of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda, a land once distinguished by freshness of intellect and force of mind. And when we find that the people of this land of ours of rich heritage and noble traditions are fast moving in the other direction and when the moral values are being eroded and that the people are losing all originality of thought, this book reminds us of our country's past glory and inspires us to draw moral lessons from this great epic.

I hope this book will be widely read and well received by all, especially those who are interested in our ancient culture and rich heritage and who desire to restore the ancient glory of our land.

Chandigarh  
July 26, 1979

JAISUKHLAL HATHI  
Governor of Punjab

## PREFACE

*Ramayana* is the life-story of Rama, the Aryan hero who worked to bring about a renaissance of the enlightened mode of life that the Vedas had revealed to the earliest seers of the human race all over the world. Around this story is scattered the history of the growth of human civilization in the earliest ages and of the people who had evolved such a civilization with zeal worthy of the wisest builders of great traditions. Valmiki was inspired to sing of Rama's adventures, when Rama had already pitched the banner of human civilization on the sub-continent of India to stem the inroads of the barbaric modes of life that had impeded the progress of civilization through the ages. As Valmiki records, the seers and races outside the Aryan fold had extended their full support to the cause of the vedic civilization, when the Aryan heroes and seers strove to establish human values from continent to continent, over the mountains, through the forests and across the seas to the most distant islands. Such, indeed, is the significance of the episodes like Rama's meeting with Guha, the chief of the tribes, his dialogues with Vanara-seer Hanuman, and later with the Vanara-king Bali and his wife Tara, when Bali lay dying. The moral approval of Rama's march to Lanka by the Vulture-seer Sampati who had been a disciple of an earlier seer Nishakara, and finally Vibhishana's, Mandodari's and Kumbhakarna's heartiest words of praise for Rama and the ideals that Rama was upholding, even as the exiled prince of Ayodhya, describes the same inter-racial acceptance of vedic ideals.

Like poetry everywhere, Valmiki's poetry flies on the wings of fancy or imagination, but it does so while revelling in the ivory tower of lyrical poetry, during its voyage to the realm of golden truths. With these impressions received from this first epic of the world, I have endeavoured to re-discover for my readers the truth about Rama's life-story which Valmiki was unfolding in canto after canto of his *Ramayana*. The summaries of the cantos here reproduce mostly the story of the *Ramayana*, and readers



interested only in the story of the *Ramayana* may do well to skip over the critical survey of the cantos succeeding these summaries.

It is hoped that the chapter about the vedic sanctions in this study of the *Ramayana* will convince the readers that there is no idealization of characters in the *Ramayana*. Valmiki's characters are true to the ideals revealed in the Vedas and pursued by countless generations before Rama. As criticism of life, poetry in the *Ramayana* projects the poet's thorough survey of the vedic ideals and his weighty judgement about the characters who inspired him for his great poem. The analysis of the poetic merits of the different cantos is meant to bring the reader nearer to the poet and the hero who ever remains the highest ideal for those who love the truthful modes of life anywhere in the world.

*Bombay*  
9.8.1981

J. K. TRIKHA

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## Chapter I

### I

## THE VEDAS, THE RAMAYANA AND THE MAHABHARATA

The Vedas are, unquestionably, the oldest literature in the world. Out of the literature of ancient India, the Brahmanas are the next to the Vedas and in the form of their language, are so close to the Vedas that these are regarded as part and parcel of the vedic literature. The Upanishads, the Grihya Sutras, Smritis and the Epics are regarded as the next in historical order. It is needless to re-examine the established chronology of these literatures, but one may legitimately question language-evidence-preoccupations of the scholars who look upon the chastened language of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as a growth of later times, not much earlier than the sixth century before Christ.

There is indeed much of popular appeal in the Vedas. Chantings of the vedic hymns, even today, hold Indian folk in devotional raptures. Beauty and freshness of ideas in the Rig Veda, the congregational set up of the ceremonials of the Yajurveda, the musical recitations of Sama Veda, and the useful lores of the Atharva Veda are features which had made the Vedas a popular literature through all the ages. Literatures that are regarded as the next successors to the Vedas are far from being popular in these ways. The spirit and poetry of the Vedic hymns are altogether absent in the prosaic literatures. The great Epics, on the other hand, keep alive the very spirit of the Vedas by retelling the vedic legends and in attempting to reproduce the age to which the vedic seers and the warriors were believed to have belonged. In fact, the Epics are the first popular sources of all those legends which tradition has ever associated with the Vedic Rishis like Bhrigu, Atri, Vasishtha, Jamadagny, Bharadvaja

and Vishvamitra or the Vedic heroes like Manu, Nahusha, Yayati, Pururavas, Yadu, Prithu and others. The *Ramayana*, indeed, is the only book to give a picture of aims, ideals, penances and sufferings of the groups of Rishis like the Balakhilyas who reveal a special section of the Vedic hymns. Whatever we might say of the chiselled language, the ideas and the tone of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* belong to far remoter ages than to which their writings are usually ascribed. Antiquity of the Epics is further supported by the evidence of the philosophical discussions in the *Mahabharata*, where thought known as the Sankhya is not distinguished from the Vedanta and is in a more popular form than either of the philosophical schools known by these names. These Epics presume in the race an unalloyed faith in the Vedas. There is little of polemical or controversial nature in these Epics and there is absolutely no evidence of any effort on the part of the great poets to revive a decaying faith. In fact, these epics are not aware of any such nation-wide decay in the faith of the people.

The Epics, thus, remain the more widely representative records of those early days in the history of civilization which arose out of the Aryan supremacy on the Indian sub-continent. Due to their close relation with the Vedas and due to the absence of any other popular guide to the sacred traditions of the Vedas, study of these Epics has been, for centuries, a part of the religious curriculum in India. These are the first popular literature to speak of the soul and concept of a life after death. These Epics popularised vedic rituals, yogic cultivation, philosophic restraint and other virtues which the Vedas had eulogized in their epithets of gods and seers.

Through the stories of great sages and rajarishis, the Epics awakened in the rank and file of the Indian people, a national zeal for a life of virtue, much before any other country received such moral ideas from prophets or poets. Traditions of wisdom from these bygone ages were preserved by these Epics in such thought-provoking symbols, myths and parables as were capable of drawing thousands of inquiring minds to find something new and strange in their meaning for every new age. In quite a new manner, the Epics conveyed to the masses, the spirit of the Vedic rituals through ideas of charity, fasts, holy baths, religious festivals, muttering of prayers and moral discipline. The great task

of moulding a peoples' life and raising the nation-wide spiritual tone of society according to the Vedic traditions was successfully carried on for centuries by the Epics. Interpretation of aims and ideals of human life in terms of Dharma, or the perennial law of life, as given in the Epics has made the Indian people so sensitive to appeals of philosophy and morality that religion even till today remains the foremost consideration for them. Appreciation of the higher values of life which has distinguished glorious ages in India from great historical periods in other countries is, indeed, a legacy from these great Epics. No scriptures have been able to maintain such a freshness of appeal for Dharma as these Epics have done. If great works of art in India remained religiously and spiritually motivated, the credit goes to the Epics which were universally adored as the literature truly representative of the Vedas. The Epics were also the first literature to make vedic lores and legends popular through poetry, the most loquacious of the forms of art. Shakuntala of Kalidasa, a legend connected with the life of a vedic seer, was adopted from the *Mahabharata*. All great paintings, architecture and sculpture in India were also inspired by the Epics. These Epics, in fact, through their popularity, have always maintained the link of the Indian people with the Vedas.

First of the Epics, the *Ramayana* represents the Vedic Dharma through the life-story of the perfect man who would inspire generations of men through ages to cherish truth and justice. The supreme example of sufferings for the sake of Dharma was narrated through the events in the life of the Rishis whose mature wisdom guided the hero at every stage of his life. The poet maintains a unity of theme by confining himself to the life-story of Rama throwing, however, much light on the state of society and the ideals cherished by the age. Tremendous activity is the note of the poem. Through the description of the construction work of the great bridge built by Rama, and the speedy work of construction through forests and over rivers by Bharata, the poet recorded the spirit of work in the age of Rama. Every character in the *Ramayana* is presented as a creative force and carries a freshness and originality in his or her experiences. Life in the *Ramayana* is set as a vast ocean of ideas, and every person on the side of Rama, be he a prince or a sage, is an ideal personality.

The Vedic age, or the age of Gods, as Valmiki calls it, had

inspired this mode of poetry in the first of Indian poets. The *Ramayana* is rich with legacy of ideals from the vedic age just gone by. Ideals of Satya and Tapas, that is, virtue and discipline of the Deva-yuga were still fresh in the race of Manu delivered from the Deluge. Ikshvaku was an epitome of truth and justice and had earned the title of Manu for being faithful to the tradition of his father, Vaivasvata Manu, who had saved mankind from a universal catastrophe. The seers to whom the Vedas were revealed afresh in the age preceding the *Ramayana*-age were devoted to the cause of virtue and were determined to shape the character of the age according to their ideals. The hero of the *Ramayana* was inspired by the visions of these dynamic thinkers whose mighty deeds were imprinted over the mountains, rivers and forests of their motherland.

The theme in the *Mahabharata* was vaster. Vyasa was recording a great civilisation which, born out of a greater past, had assimilated ideals from the various succeeding ages and had potentialities of lasting for an endless future. It was with this aim that he embarked on a larger setting than any Epic writer had done before or after him. Endowed with a vision of the eternal laws of Truth and Justice, he recounted all great victories of the good over the wicked during crises which civilisation faced in all the different ages. His main theme, the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, was a continuation of the same struggle in a new form. Evil had crept in the Aryan race and means of crushing evil would be equally detrimental to good itself. The poet had to justify the cause of war not only to the participants in the struggle, but to thousands of future generations who should not fail to see justice in the action of the five survivors out of the hosts of warriors. He had to bring the tales of pre-severance, toleration and forgiveness to a climax not only in the enactment of life-drama in a single generation, but through a narration of endless triumphs and sufferings of humanity in the past. Justice and Law had to be described not only in abstract theses but in its effects in the form of glory, prosperity and peace that reigned under kings who sacrificed personal interest to dictates of Law. So was evil to be described in its devastating effects like extinctions of races, wars, famines, unrest and larger catastrophes. Strings of tales, illustrating virtues and condemning vice, thus, relate conflicts between gods and asuras, between



Garuda and Snakes, between sages and kings, and between man and man. Description of places which had been holy through association with sacrifices and penances of holy sages and kings are given to inspire devotion and unselfish action in the coming generations and, in fact, nothing connected with the past was found irrelevant or redundant for such a vast theme. Characters in the *Mahabharata* are presented in realistic colours. They are not at all creative thinkers. Most of them are indeed protagonists of virtue and law, but they submit to circumstances. Even the wisest, like Bhishma and Drona, side with the unjust Duryodhana. Choices of the warriors to fight on one side or the other is a matter of mere caprice or chance. Shalya came to fight for the Pandavas, but the royal reception accorded to him by Duryodhana shifted his personal support to the other side. Most of the warriors agreed to side with those who sought their aid before the other parties could approach. Alliances were much like election-campaigns of the modern democratic age, so that even Lord Krishna's plea for personally siding with Arjuna was that Arjuna met his glance before Lord Krishna noticed Duryodhana, although the latter had come earlier. The warriors fought not for a sense of duty or for maintenance of the eternal Law of justice, but for excelling others. Display of superior prowess was a matter of honour, and maintaining vanities was a matter of prestige. Virtue or vice was of the least consideration for those who were arrayed in the great battle. Karna, who otherwise was generous and virtuous beyond measure, plotted underhand schemes against the noble Pandavas as earnestly as Duryodhana himself. Passions ruled, and ideas were suppressed. Even Yudhisthira and his brothers would have allowed the evil to grow under their very nose, had they been allowed mere existence in spite of it. Arjuna's recoiling from war was an index of the age. The fight for justice was the last resort with these law-abiding Pandavas. Glory be to Lord Krishna, who alone amongst hosts of warriors was untouched by vanities of the age, and inspired the virtuous Pandavas to save law even at the cost of extinction of the warrior-race. Lord Krishna's unimpaired vision of truth, justice and chaste impulse for right, flawless and un-failing actions were the marks of a personality, of which earlier ages of Manu, Vamana and Shri Rama might well have been proud. This incarnation of the Supreme Goodness was the saviour

of ideals which the Mahabharatan civilisation was likely to sacrifice under the dominating rule of passion. Had Duryodhana been allowed to live in the name of kinship or in the name of the Aryan race, our civilisation today would have been destitute of those spiritual values of which India still remains proud. The difference in the civilisation of the age of the Ramayana and the age of the Mahabharata is apparent in the conceptions of evil of the two epics. Whether due to a curse or some other reason, Ravana desists from violence to a lady even in his prison, where Duryodhana, an Aryan, would do violence in public to a lady of his own family.

The two Epics together inculcate in man all spiritual, moral and aesthetic values that art in all its forms has ever been capable of inspiring. The *Ramayana* elevates the soul, while the *Mahabharata* widens the mind. The *Ramayana* looks like fulfilment of a hope or a dream. Everything is much above our standards and expectations. We can only wonder at and admire the lofty ideals and loftier achievements of the age. The *Mahabharata* looks much like a book of our own times, for it deals with problems which are the same for any age. It is a record of legions of mightier arms, but only smaller groups of mightier minds. Humanity today has the same problems as it had in the time of the *Mahabharata*. The thought and philosophy of the Mahabharatan days have not lost their meanings to us. Whatever was present there in the form of schools of thought is still available to us. The Vedanta and the Sankhya of the Mahabharatan days are only preludes to the Vedanta and the Sankhya available today. Every-day language and idiom of the Aryan race in any part of the globe, even to this day might be found, on analysis, to be inherited from the Mahabharatan age. At least the Indian languages and dialects speak of life and death, good and evil, penance and salvation in the same idiom as is found in the *Mahabharata*. Continuity of civilisation is the reason for this akinness of the Mahabharatan thought and idiom to the thought and idiom of our own times. There have apparently been no big gaps. The evolution of society has been going on through natural growths and decays. There has been no whole-sale extinction of a form of life and thought since the *Mahabharata* was composed. Wars, epidemics, earthquakes and famines have not been able to obliterate man's inheritance of the Mahabharatan civilisation.

## II

### THE RAMAYANA

The case is different with the age of the *Ramayana*. The civilisation of the *Ramayana* period has grown so remote that much in the *Ramayana* looks like a creation of imagination. The ideals, howsoever noble, look rather out of date and impracticable. The cult of Yajna of the *Ramayana* age is much older than the Mahabharatan cults of devotion or the philosophical realisation of Truth. The *Ramayana* is breathing the spirit of an age nearer to Nature. Man claimed kinship with rivers and mountains and looked to gods as his immediate guardians. While some races like the Vanaras were on the way to civilisation in the footsteps of the Aryans, most of the other races represented by cannibals like Tadaka, Viradha and degenerate Khara and Dushana, hardly deserved the appellation of man. They lived in forests and their ways were not much different from beasts'. Their war-fares were usually man-to-man wrestling, and their arms mostly rock-pieces, trees, and maces. Rama and Lakshmana were, indeed, advanced in the use of arms and powerful missiles. In the *Mahabharata*, all warriors were equally great masters in the use of strongest of missiles. The Mahabharatan War was a competition in the display of superior skill in arms.

The Mahabharatan Age had evolved a more practical form of faith in the Vedas. Sacrifices were no more performed for self-purification as was done in the *Ramayana*. Even the nobles like Bhishma and Yudhisthira do not know of perfecting spiritual life through vedic rituals. The Horse-Sacrifice of these days is a symbol of power rather than faith. In the *Ramayana*, devotion to the vedic cult of Yajna is universal. The vedic ritual is fervently pursued by kings and sages alike. Rishis like Vishvamitra laid out great yajnas only for self-elevation. All success in life is regarded as the immediate fruit of Yajnas performed with proper care. The Yajna for progeny rewards Dasharatha promptly with

the birth of four sons. The Monkey-King Bali, too, observed daily vedic meditations, and it was in one of these evening meditations that he held Ravana tight under his armpit, when the latter challenged him to a duel. Even Meghanada, Ravana's son, performed a Yajna for securing a victory over Lakshmana. Ravana was believed to have got all his power by virtue of a sacrifice to God Shiva. Such a universal belief in the vedic Yajna is much earlier than the Mahabharatan cults of Bhakti or devotion or the philosophic realisation of the soul.

Stories and legends of the two Epics strike quite distinct notes. Series of deeply suggestive stories in the *Ramayana* are records of mighty deeds of the heroes of the past. All the legends are reminiscent of the dawn of life on this earth. Rama's ancestors are spoken of as heroes who moved mountains, wrought passages for rivers, dug up seas, and laid foundations of big cities. Sagara's sons fixed the ocean within the bounds of its shores. Bhagiratha brought Ganga to the Indian plains for the peace of thousands of departed souls. These inspiring legends speak of the *Ramayana* Age as more intensely dynamic than the Mahabharatan. The *Ramayana* in these reminiscences is clearly many centuries older than the *Mahabharata* whose legends and stories are only love-tales of those great heroes of the past which had grown indistinct at the time of the composition of the *Mahabharata*. In stories like those of Pururavas, Nahusha, Yayati, Puru, Nala and Shakuntala's son Bharata, Vyasa was only recounting those great figures who had contributed towards civilisation in the past, and whom the people of the Mahabharatan age were probably forgetting in the moment of their glory. There is an undertone of a feeling in the Mahabharata that civilisation had already reached a climax and was on the point of collapse. Vairagya or detachment is strongly propagated in the Gita. This was an aftermath of the zenith of a glorious civilisation which, later on, was followed by the growth of Buddhism and other pessimistic philosophies just in the same manner as the glorious age of Pericles was followed by philosophical ages in Athens, beginning with Socrates and Plato and ending in the Stoics, the Cynics and the Epicureans.

Valmiki's poetry and theme were buoyant with the hope and faith that men had inherited from the preceding generations. Rama is nowhere baffled by considerations which paralyse



Arjuna's mind and body in the battlefield. Pessimistic philosophy is altogether absent in the *Ramayana*. In fact, there was no room for any such philosophy in that age in which heroic deeds of Indra were recited every morning through the vedic hymns. Rama is impatient with any rationalising or pleasure-hunting thought that distracts man from participating in the ancient plan of Dharma laid out by Manu and the Seers. This is evident from Rama's reproachful rejoinder to priest Jabali who advised him to return to Ayodhya and to make the best of Bharata's regards for him. Rama was proud to follow the example of his ancestors who had never sought to have a compromise between dictates of Dharma and the emergencies of circumstances. Rama's teacher, Vishvamitra, too, had inspired Rama for prompt action, not through discourses on the soul, or on the life hereafter with promise of rewards in heaven, but through stories of valiant men and dynamic personalities of the past. It was in later ages that metaphysical precepts were needed to tone up society, when even the best amongst men were only half willing to accept life as a field for righteous action, and when purity of the moral outlook of the Ramayana-age was evidently giving place to a growing sensuality in the nation. Poetry of the *Mahabharata*, inspite of its supreme success in maintaining the moral tone, could not help reflecting such a change in the moral outlook to a perceptible degree.

It is nothing short of a miracle or a plan shaped by Divinity that these two great Epics should so exhaustively represent the depth and breadth of life in the age of the vedic heroes. While the *Ramayana* describes the greatness of the human heart, the *Mahabharata* surveys all that humanity had achieved, enjoyed and suffered in that great epoch. Though Valmiki and Vyasa had both been inspired by the glories of the vedic civilisation, Vyasa had drawn much from the *Ramayana* for the central theme of his poem. This was in the fitness of things, for sage Vyasa, whom tradition accredits with the arrangement of the Vedas in their present form, and who revived the vedic studies through hosts of his selfless disciples, must have realised that the *Ramayana* represented more truly the spirit of the vedic age than any other ritualistic or philosophical literature. Popularity of the *Ramayana* even in those early days must have indeed inspired younger sages

to emulate Valmiki, and one of the sages, Vyasa, did certainly complete the task which Valmiki had envisaged.

It was in a spirit of homage to the earlier poet that Vyasa recalled Valmiki as one of those ancient seers who came from heaven to listen to Lord Krishna's great oration in the court of Duryodhana. A perfected piece of oratory composed in the climactic moment of his great poem was offered by Vyasa as an humble gift to those earlier sages who had inspired the youngest among the seers of vedic lineage. To acknowledge his debt to Valmiki, Vyasa mentions Dasharatha's son, Rama, several times. The story of Rama is one of the stories that Dhritarashtra listens to in the most distressed moment of his life. Again, when in Duryodhana's conference with his comrades, Karna is insolent to Bhishma and Drona, Vidura advises Dhritarashtra not to allow youngsters to be so impolite to the grand old men who were wise and venerable like the ancient kings Rama and Gaya. Vidura said:

"These two men are venerable for their age, intelligence and experience; and they are, O king, impartial to your son and to the sons of Pandu. As followers of Law and Truth, these two, O Bharata King, undoubtedly are not second to Rama, the son of Dasharatha or to Gaya."

Verses 5 & 6 *Adi Parva*, *Adhyaya* 204

Gaya is the royal seer of two hymns in the fifth book of the Rig Veda. It is significant that the *Mahabharata* introduces Rama and Gaya in so close association in these lines, to speak at length of them both in the section of Yudhisthira's pilgrimage to holy places. At Gaya, the celebrated place of pilgrimage, Yudhisthira is inspired to listen to the story of the King Gaya. In his despairing moods, Yudhisthira is cheered by the sage Markandeya to look upon himself as the most celebrated personality of his times, for Yudhisthira was a pious king, who like Yayati, Pururavas, Bhagiratha, Rama, Ikshvaku, Manu and Puru, was the resort of Dharma. These references to Rama, at the various stages in the *Mahabharata*, speak of the popularity of the *Ramayana* and its hero in the Mahabharatan days. Some of the versions of the *Mahabharata* describe Arjuna's winning of Draupadi as similar to winning of Sita by Rama.

"Leaving Princes, the King's daughter promptly garlanded Arjuna, and modestly stood beside him. She looked like Shachi who had chosen Indra, or like Swaha who had chosen Agni, or like Lakshmi who had chosen Vishnu, or like Dawn who had chosen Surya, or like Rati who had chosen the god of Love, or like the Mountain-king's daughter who had chosen Maheshwara, or like the daughter of the King of Mithila who had chosen Rama as her husband."

In Vana Parva of the *Mahabharata*, Hanuman, one of the characters of the *Ramayana*, recounts the adventures of Rama. The story of Rama as given here, as well as given later on by the sage Markandeya, agrees with and presumes the existence of the *Ramayana* of Valmiki. These repeated references to Rama in the Vana Parva or Yudhisthira's sojourn in the forest do not fail to give an impression that Vyasa had in his mind the story of a great hero who had spent most of his life in the forest. This impression is confirmed after Draupadi's abduction by Jayadratha, the King of Sindhu. Events of Yudhisthira's life are here compared to Rama's life. Draupadi's abduction was similar to Sita's abduction by Ravana. Yudhisthira is consoled to submit to fate as Rama had similarly done in the past. Yudhisthira's forfeiture of his share in the Kingdom, his living in disguise at King Virata's Court, were not unprecedented events. Rama had lost his Kingdom and Vishnu had to live in disguise as Dasharatha's son, when he had to vanquish Ravana. All these details show very clearly that the *Ramayana* had been a popular story by the time of the *Mahabharata*. Vyasa was proud to see his hero as an epitome of virtue, as the hero of the earlier poet had been. There is clearly an effort on the part of Vyasa to raise the status of his own hero, Yudhisthira, and give an auspiciousness to the later Epic by its association with the earlier Epic.

The story of King Sagara, whose sons were destroyed by the wrath of Sage Kapila, is narrated in the *Mahabharata* in the manner of the *Ramayana*. Bhagiratha's adventures to bring Ganga to the land of the Aryans is similarly described. The story of Rishyashringa, the sage, who was coaxed to come to the state of Anga to wed King Lomapada's daughter, is also narrated in the manner of the *Ramayana*. Vyasa seems to narrate these stories under the impression that some of these events and names were well-known. Lomapada is mentioned by no other epithet but as

Dasharatha's friend who became king of the Angas. This reference to King Dasharatha not only makes it very clear that Dasharatha was a well-known figure of the past, but it also proves that the author of the *Mahabharata* presumed popularity of the Rishyashringa story through the *Ramayana*. Some details are added, as was quite natural. Rishyashringa is described as having a goat's horn on his head. This was evidently an explanation of the sage's name which in the days of the *Ramayana* was too well-known to need such a far-fetched explanation.

The Puranas, which followed the example of the *Mahabharata* in adoring the Vedic tradition, all paid their homage to the *Ramayana*. These sages held *Ramayana* to be the first poetry after the Vedas and Valmiki the first poet. Poet after poet in India speaks of Valmiki's work as an ideal piece of poetry. Ashvaghosha pays homage to this work of art by modelling his Buddha-Charitam, or the life of Buddha, after the *Ramayana*. His poetry is mainly inspired by the *Ramayana*, of which he speaks even in his Sutra-alankar. The greatest historical figure of Buddha could not be drawn in line with the hero of the *Ramayana* unless the *Ramayana* had been regarded as the holiest of books dealing with the life of the holiest amongst men. Buddha's father, Shuddhodhana, without Buddha in the Buddha-Charitam, compares himself to Dasharatha without Rama. The poet Bhasa had plots for his plays from the *Ramayana*. Earlier, still, Kalidasa wrote a full poem *Raghuvamsha* in honour of Rama's family. He closes his well-known poem of *Meghaduta* by asking the cloud to deliver the Yaksha's message to his beloved wife as faithfully as Hanuman conveyed Rama's message to Maithili, Sita. This ending note for making a reference to the auspicious story of the *Ramayana* by one of the greatest poets of all times, speaks of the popularity of the *Ramayana* in ancient India. Tradition could not be confused about such a popular work, and the doubt that modern scholars sometimes hold against the *Ramayana* being the first of the Epics is only a misleading mental aberration.

Valmiki was the first poet to sing of Rama's name which has ever been held as auspicious as the sacred syllable 'OM'. Great saints, including Guru Nanak and Kabir, held the name of Rama as above all other names of the Highest Being. The sweetest of the Epics of the later times, namely *Rama-Charita Manasa* by



## THE RAMAYANA

Tulsidas was composed in honour of the hero of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. All these poets and saints confirm and endorse the opinion of the *Mahabharata* and the Puranas that Rama was born in the earliest days of the Aryan civilisation.

### III

## MAHARSHI VALMIKI THE FOUNTAIN-HEAD OF CIVILIZATION

To the contemporary Rishis who had revealed Divine knowledge in the form of the Vedas, and the Munis who had established schools of scientific thought for the enlightenment and welfare of man-kind, Valmiki was known as the Prachetas, or the Highest Intellectual of all times. Brahma, the Creator, had appeared at Valmiki's hermitage to accost him as His son, and the celestial Seer Narada had descended from Heaven to confer upon him the title of 'Kavi', which was a unique distinction of the age. As Brahma alone had so far been adored as the 'Kavi,' the seers of the age were looking upon Valmiki as the successor to Brahma Himself: for their visions of the Cycles of Creation revealed to them Valmiki being raised to the status of Brahma by the Divine laws of Evolution of souls. Patriarchs of the Vedic age had been Valmiki's disciples and the aged seer's Ashrama was frequented by the newer generations of seers for references, as it was a living museum of lores of wisdom by which enlightenment could be moulded for the benefit of mankind.

When Rama decided to send Sita to a hermitage, he must have recalled countless hermitages that he had visited during his fourteen years of exile. His choice of Valmiki as the custodian of his beloved wife and her forthcoming issue, speaks volumes about the merits of Valmiki's hermitage in those days when every hermitage had rarest merits of its own. It is true that Sita's abode in that Ashrama was not made an open secret and the secret of the choice was not divulged till the superior knowledge of arms on the part of Rama's twin sons, Lava and Kusha, revealed it in their victory over Rama's own comrades including the peerless warriors like Lakshmana and Hanuman. Yet Rama must have realised that the sage who in his penances had allowed ant-hills to grow over him must have preserved all the lores

of knowledge and tradition that were necessary and sufficient to make Rama's progeny worthiest warriors and rulers after him.

Valmiki justified Rama's trust and gave back to him the twin ascetic heroes from whom most glorious of kings, saints and saintly warriors have proudly claimed their ancient lineage. With the resounding twang of their mighty bows and the hissing of their paralysing arrows, the twin urchins, Lava and Kusha, announced to the greatest warriors of the times that the elderly generation's mastery in arms was insignificant and outdated before the knowledge of the arms imparted by the great Preceptor Valmiki. The two lads who stopped, in sheer sport, the entry of the Sacrificial Horse to the holy hermitage could only give a smile, when the heroes of the greatest battlefield of the time discovered that the twin sons of Suryavamshi race had their instructions from the greatest Preceptor among the chosen Preceptors of the time.

These instructions in the superior arms were only a part of the teaching which Valmiki gave to his foster-sons in his secluded hermitage. He had taught them to sing of the adventures of the most ancient of heroes like Ikshvaku, Bhagiratha, Raghu, Dilipa and Dasharatha, and of the godly heroes like Kumara. He had composed for these warrior-minstrels, myths of Nature, birth of the purifying streams like Ganga, stories of Vasishtha's vow of truth and non-violence and of Vishvamitra's adventures around the world and his frantic struggles for raising himself from a warrior-sage to the status of a Brahmarshi. He had narrated to them tales from the hoary past, when sages like Kapila could burn to ashes the legions of the warriors of Sagara proudly carrying the Horse-symbol of war to the peaceful corners of the earth. He had recounted to them how even the follies of Indra, the chief of gods, could not go unpunished, when he tempted a sage's wife in a holy hermitage and bequeathed the curse on his head to the mankind in general. He had taught to them to reflect on the sacrifices of those pioneer Rishis who had advanced to the wildernesses for the spread of human civilisation in the face of threats from the cannibals and monsters. He had inspired them with the highest ideals of missionary sages like Agastya, Sutikshna and Sharabhanga who had entered the vow of sacrifice in order to impart to Rama the experiences from

their own memoirs. But for Valmiki's narrations, all these great episodes of Aryan civilisation would have been lost to us.

Valmiki alone was competent to compose the story of the blessed birth of Rama, the tragic incident of his exile, the horrifying details of the luxuriant love, giant adventures and bloody feuds from the primitive world of the Vanara race, and the great story of Rama's glorious victory over Ravana. Valmiki alone could make these episodes rich with instruction and crystallised wisdom that have enlightened thousands of generations in India and abroad. It is not a fable that Brahma Himself had commanded Valmiki to launch upon the task of composing the *Ramayana* for the good of mankind and to awaken in man the noblest of sentiments like those uttered in Vishvamitra's despairing cry,

"Fie on the force of warriors,

For the highest Power lies in knowledge and prayer"; or in Tara's mourning over Bali's death by an arrow shot from Rama,

"Let no wise man ever give a daughter to a warrior"; or in Rama's rejection of Lakshmana's counsel for occupying Lanka after having conquered it,

"Even if made of gold, Lanka, O Lakshmana, attracts me not,  
"Giver of birth, my Motherland, is far dearer than even the Paradise".

Who could ever construct a genesis of Valmiki who seems to be very much among the first pioneers of civilisation for his spiritual kinship with the Creator. The patriarch-seers in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* universally acknowledge him to be the first artist to delineate joys and sorrows that surge in the mighty stream of human life. Valmiki does not speak of himself in the *Ramayana*. The *Mahabharata* and the Puranas speak of him as the first of the seer-poets worthy of highest respect and sincerest devotion. He is already the spirit and patron-seer of poetry for the later seers and poets. He is Vyasa's ideal, and as such no mere idealisation or deification of a name in the hazy past. Whenever Vyasa stops to reflect meditatively on the source of his inspiration, he pays his homage to Valmiki who remains for Vyasa, the ever-sought and ever-pursued model for the themes, the substance and the values that make the *Mahabharata* the greatest epic of all times.

Valmiki's lineage is embodied in his title as Prachetas. This title in the Rig Veda belongs to Divinity as Varuna and Savita.



The Prachetas were also the ten Prajapatis, or the Originators of life, and though ten, were one mind and one soul and performed mighty deeds, as if these were deeds of one soul. They spread themselves beyond all lands and over all seas in all the ten directions to reveal laws of life in the universe. The Harivansha Purana mentions them as the mind-born sons of the Divine Being. May be, Valmiki was one of them, or one who succeeded to their knowledge infinite in all perfection. The most ancient of seers looked upon him as the more ancient. He is indeed an incarnation of the Divine Wisdom, for his knowledge about the races, the Earth, the sea and space is as perfect and spontaneous as knowledge could ever be.

Rare information about the extinct species of life and about the geography of those ages through Sugriva's travels around the world, knowledge about the space through narrations of Jatayu's, Sampati's, Jambavanta's and Hanuman's flights into space; exposition of Dharma or the Eternal Laws of Life through the conduct of Bharata and other ancient heroes were handed over to the worthiest sons of Sita, the Daughter of the Earth, rightly to be sung in Rama's court, where the greatest of the seers, poets and philosophers of the time could discover for themselves the traditions they would like to pass on to the future generations through their own schools of wisdom, art and ancient traditions.

Thus did Valmiki, the Preceptors' Preceptor, redeem Rama from his embarrassments, vindicated Sita's unsullied honour, composed the *Ramayana* and revealed landmarks in the passage of Aryan civilisation through remotest ages, so that India remains the cherished land of glory for the Indian people. The world is indebted to Valmiki for all that is known as art, poetry and knowledge. Homer's *Iliad* gives proofs of its being inspired from Valmiki. Vyasa, the composer of the *Mahabharata*, might have closed his career with the classification of the Vedic text, had not the *Ramayana* of Valmiki inspired him to write the Great War-Epic. Kalidasa's lyrical Epic, *Kumara-Sambhava* or the birth of Kumara, the Divine General, and the other Epic, the *Raghuvamsha*, were inspired by Valmiki. Ashvagosh's *Buddha-Charitam* or the life of the Buddha, was shaped after the *Ramayana* of Valmiki. Besides these poets of great renown, hundreds of poets and saints warbled out their compositions. songs and

litanies to adore Rama's merits as narrated by Valmiki. Countless painters, sculptors and architects through ages dedicated their talents for depicting episodes of Rama's life. The Vishnu cult which has created in the Indian people devotion to the Righteous and given them the strength to defend themselves against odds, was indeed bequeathed by Valmiki to whom we owe also the Bhakti movements through ages and the flowering of the devotional sentiments that we find in the *Rama-Charita Manasa* of Tulsidas.

All this is, indeed, no small contribution towards the building up of the massive edifice of civilisation in India. We may wonder how much Valmiki knew, and how much he had preserved under the ant-hills in his great hermitage. We can imagine him to be looking forward to the coming ages for whom he was replacing the stories of gods with the stories of men and the greatest men of all times. He was ushering in a transition, and the transition he was bringing about was to be in the ideals and outlooks of the people who were the offsprings of heroes marching on great adventures. He gave to the people of his time the welfare outlook of friendly association of races and peaceful settlement of communities. The striking message of the *Ramayana* of Valmiki is the friendly co-operation between races, between the civilised and the barbarians and between the advanced and the backward people. In dilating upon Rama's friendship with the tribal king Nishadha, with the Vanara-king Sugriva, with the noble chief of the Vulture tribe, Jatayu, with the humble born Bhilani in the forest and with Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana, Valmiki was giving his versions of the laws of existence. He was indeed enamoured of Rama, when the great king was laying the foundation of a strong nation by calling these representatives of different races to be the citizens of the Kingdom of Ayodhya after his return from exile.

We may well call Valmiki the first humanitarian poet of those ages in which man was emerging out of the races of the giants and monsters. The virtues eulogised by Valmiki in the happy relationship of the four brothers at Ayodhya were for Valmiki the best of the features of human living. When Valmiki chose to narrate the heroic deeds of Rama, the man who shouldered the burden of vanquishing an invincible warrior of the Dev-Asura wars, Valmiki was looking forward to the potentiality of

the human race to carry on the struggle for existence by itself instead of looking to any help from the heaven above. For his shaping into a whole, the episodes in the life of the hero, Valmiki has been rightly adored since earliest times as the crowning gem of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning. He has left to us a heritage through the *Ramayana* and through his traditions of Ashramas set up by his disciples like Bharadwaja and Yajna-*valkya*. To these Ashramas countless princes and scholars in all ages went for spiritual enlightenment and scientific studies, and in these Ashramas sciences and arts did flourish with the pious traditions of discipline and chastity. When Kalidasa described Shakuntala, the daughter of a nymph, being brought up at Kanva's Ashrama, he was paying tributes to such Ashramas, where beauty and purity grew together as it grew in Valmiki's Ashrama, where Sita, the purest gem of civilisation lived under the Sage's protection.

Valmiki is also an *Adi-Kavi*, or the first of poets, because he composed his great poem in *Loka-bhasha* or the language of the people. Panini, Patanjali and Katyayana speak of the popular Sanskrit language as different from the vedic language. The poetic genius of Valmiki carved for itself a medium of expression which embodied all popular idiom of the age, when civilisation was enlarging its dimensions. Valmiki made the language which could encompass this new stature of civilisation. For composing a popular poem, Valmiki was to humanise the *deva-vani*, or the language of the gods. He makes Hanuman address Sita in this language. It is this language that makes the *Ramayana* and also the *Mahabharata*, the most popularly recited holy scriptures in every part of India. No Indian poet, however great, could ever afford to ignore the great Epics which have ever been a store-house of idiom, diction and ideas for all the generations of Indian poets.

## *Chapter II*

### BALA KANDAM

To appreciate the plan of the poem, we should analyse the first book into its topics. The first four chapters of the first Book are a sort of a preface.

The real book starts directly with the description of Ayodhya. Within twenty-three verses, the poet has described the great city strongly defended with cannon, arms, and soldiers worthy of a great capital. The next sarga of twenty-eight verses describes the prosperity of the people, who are well-dressed, and honestly occupied in their respective pursuits. It is a highly civilised people that we meet here. No body is poor or indolent. They are free from diseases and discontent. They pride on having Dasharatha as their king who has established friendly relations with the neighbouring states. The sixth sarga describes the healthy traditions of the state in having descendants of great rishis as state-priests. The civilian officers are not unnecessarily cruel. The people usually abstain from crimes. The king's treasure is filled with one-sixth of the income of businessmen. The Brahmins and Kshatriyas are free from taxes as they are part and parcel of the state-administration and defence. The king loves justice and the people are devoted to him. The sarga ends with the verse comparing the king and his ministers with the Sun and his bright rays.

The eighth sarga comes straight to describe the king's unhappiness for being without a son. The king wishes to perform an Ashvamedha, or the horse-sacrifice. The ministers welcome the suggestion, and orders are given for making necessary arrangements. The queens are happy to be anointed for the sacrificial rites.

Sargas nine to fourteen introduce to us Rishyashringa, the young ascetic who had been brought up by his father in a forest, away from all social life. He had never seen a woman. His pleasant surprise on seeing beautiful ladies, adept in art of love, and his



coming with them to the town, his being married to Shanta, the daughter of Dasharatha's friend Angaraj, and his finally being called to Ayodhya by Dasharatha to act as the chief priest for the sacrifice, are all so well told; giving us a view of the state of society which believed in asceticism of the highest order as the means to success in sacrifices. The horse is set free and returns after a year. The poet wastes not a single word over the journey of the sacrificial horse. King Dasharatha was, indeed, friendly with all the powerful rulers of other states. The horse-sacrifice for him was only a holy symbol of sacrifice. For others, it was the symbol of Dasharatha's established power, and the horse's passage through a state was a challenge to them to accept the supremacy of the king who had set the horse. No apprehensions of a resistance are entertained by old Dasharatha who takes a formal vow of the sacrifice expecting a safe return of the horse. All other Aryan kings join the sacrifice as a mark of respect for the Vedic rites. The sacrifice is described in every minute detail. Had there been a later hand to subscribe to this portion of the poem with motives of giving an undue importance to the Brahmanical culture of sacrifices, we might have found some lengthy discourse on the value of sacrifices or on the value of gifts. There is none as such in the *Ramayana*. The narration goes on to announce the chief priest's blessings for the king with a prediction for the birth of his four sons.

The next three sargas from fifteen to seventeen, add a new interest to the main story. In sarga fifteen, the chief priest, Rishya-shringa, performs a highly mystic sacrifice on the lines of the Atharva Veda school. The gods who were invoked with oblations approached Brahma, the Creator, to relate their tale of woe about Ravana's atrocities. The Creator promised help. Soon Vishnu appears on the scene and is informed of the sufferings of gods and men. He condescends to be born as the Man, for Ravana could not be directly killed by a god. Vishnu disappears after telling the gods that he has chosen king Dasharatha to be His father.

In sarga 17 Brahma advises the gods to be born as mighty monkey-warriors, who would be comrades in arms of the Hero Rama. These gods procreate monkeys through women of various classes and the earth is over-crowded with hosts of monkeys under Bali, Sugriva, Hanuman, Nala, Nila and the Bear-warrior Jambavanta who was already born out of Brahma's yawn. In the mean-

time, in sarga sixteen, a vase of sacrament, which was a milk-preparation, had been offered to Dasharatha by a divine messenger who appeared from the sacrificial pit. The three chief queens who partook of this divine food conceived without delay, and the king was happy to see the advanced pregnancy of the queens. The poet, who, in all the foregoing sargas of only three hundred and four verses was running on in his narration, devotes four hundred and one verses for this new interest in the main theme. The sarga fourteen had ended with the chief priest's blessings, predicting birth of the four sons of Dasharatha. Sarga eighteen starts again with the theme of the Horse-sacrifice which having ended, the gods departed to heaven. The king with the queens entered the palace after the vow was over. The guests were given a hearty farewell. The chief priest left with his wife Shanta. After a year, Rama was born with half the might of Vishnu. Continuity of the topic of the fourteenth sarga in the eighteenth sarga is unbroken, making the intervening three sargas look like an interlude. The diversion from the arena of sacrifice to the abode of gods is dramatic and is a theme by itself.

The first Book of the *Ramayana* strikes a note of auspiciousness through mention of Godhead and other deities of the Aryan race. Godhead of the *Ramayana* is Vishnu. This great champion of the Devas against Asuras is as much the hero of the first Epic of the world as Rama, the perfect man. After the Vedas, the *Ramayana* is the pioneer scripture to eulogise Vishnu as the protector of the good. It is through the *Ramayana* for the first time that we know of the might of the Godhead of our land and people. Before Rama, the Man, is born, we are told how the gods approach Vishnu to save humanity from the great monster, Ravana. Godhead is pleased to promise help, and poetry happily sings of the childhood of Rama born as an incarnation of Vishnu.

The theme of Vishnu's incarnation is in keeping with Valmiki's aim and conviction. In sarga eighteen, Rama is described as born with half the might of Vishnu. It is a credit to the poet's sense of realism in that early age that he elevated his hero to the status of an incarnation gradually during the progress of the first Book. He does not impose a belief on his readers, but lets them watch the hero's growth with wonder till the great Bow would be broken, and when the warrior sage Rama would declare that the hero was the promised Incarnation of Vishnu. A similar unspoken

conviction in the mind of Vishvamitra made him select prince Rama as the worthy pupil for receiving highest training in the celestial arms and missiles. The fifteenth sarga prepares the readers to mark the birth of such a hero. Sarga seventeen is a similar preparation for the Kishkindha-Kandam where the monkey-chiefs are known as sons of Indra, Surya, Agni and Vayu. Sarga seventeen, describing the birth of these monkey-heroes, is a proof of the artist's consciousness of the architectural design of his great poem. He builds every section of the poem in close harmony with the design of the whole. He has the whole poem in his view all the time. Every little detail adds to the growth of the story. The consort of gods in these early sections is quite authentic and relevant, for later on in the Aranya Kandam when Ravana abducts Sita, and there is a frown on the surface of the sea, and the sky looks gloomy, Brahma, the Creator, is happy to note that his mission in sending Rama to the world of men is fulfilled, and that humanity would be freed from its scourge. Whatever we may think of this theory of incarnation, Valmiki is nowhere forcing it on us. The world of gods of the Vedas is left far behind, and the poet finds a new hope in Man's capacity to fight with the mightiest of giants. He raises Rama to the status of Vishnu in a manner which is pleasing and convincing. It is an honour to the Mother-Earth that one of her sons was going to do mighty deeds worthy of gods. There is a beauty of conception in the idea that no god could kill Ravana, and that man alone could exterminate the giant of evil from the earth. Man was responsible for maintaining a lawful order on the earth, and unless man shouldered his responsibilities, gods' frowns were meaningless. Rama is born in Sarga eighteen which has a marvellously rapid flow. The four brothers have grown to a marriageable age within twenty eight verses, from eight to thirty six. Then appears on the stage the great sage Vishvamitra who is received with great respect by the king asking the sage to command him anything. Encouraged by the king's willingness to do anything for him, the sage, in sarga nineteen, asks the king for the two brothers, Rama and Lakshmana, to go with him to the forests, where he was performing his last great sacrifice. This sacrifice was disturbed by the two monsters, Maricha and Subahu, and the sage could not accomplish this last great object of his life. These monsters were powerful, and were patronised by the most powerful of the monsters, Ravana, who



was a great enemy of the rishis. It is here in the main story that we are told of Ravana as a formidable enemy of the Aryans. In sarga twenty, the king very shrewdly backs out from his promise, and tells the sage that the king's armies led by the king himself would have gone to help the sage against any monsters, but as these monsters had been set by Ravana, Dasharatha could not help the sage in any way. In the king's opinion, Rama was only an inexperienced youth. He had hardly completed sixteen years and his knowledge of arms had not been matured by experience in a battle. As for himself, the king was mortally afraid of Ravana and his followers. In sarga twentyone, Vishvamitra prepares to leave the court in anger, and we are told that the sage's anger was capable of disturbing the three worlds. Vasishtha intervenes and declares to the king that the princes would be safe under Vishvamitra's guidance. It was in the interest of Rama's growth that he should go with the sage who alone knew the use of a hundred powerful missiles invented in the remote past by the women sages named Jaya and Suprabha. The sage Vishvamitra had himself invented some powerful weapons, and if Rama accompanied the sage, both would be benefited. Sage Vishvamitra's prowess was not known to man or gods. The king agrees to send his sons. In sarga twentytwo, poetry moves more rhythmically than before. Sage Vishvamitra and the two brothers move like three gods. They are like Ashvini Kumaras following the Creator, or the two sons of Shiva keeping pace with him. The sage is happy. His tender care of the two brothers is remarkable. Fatherly love or the Vatsalya Rasa is the note of this section of the poem. Expression is highly chastened during the great sage's passage through rivers and forests. The two brothers are initiated into Bala and Mahabala, probably some inspiring secrets of a healthy and strong field-life. The three spend the night under a clear starry sky by the side of the river Sarayu where it meets Ganga.

Sargas twentythree to thirty are fine specimens of narrative poetry. The hero is being educated day and night in contact with the sage who is himself one of the greatest heroes of the past. Vishvamitra narrates stories which are highly suggestive. There seems to be a subtle design in the theme of these stories.

The first of these stories is the killing of the god of love by the ascetic Lord Shiva. Kalidasa has described this in his nature-myth of *Kumara-Sambhava*, and many other puranas refer to the event



at length. The story in the *Ramayana* is simple and brief. Lord Shiva is described as a historical sage who some time lived in the holy place near the confluence of Sarayu with Ganga. God of love also then had a corporeal form which fell from him, when the god interfered with Shiva's asceticism. The myth is reduced to its minimum. No cause and no third person like Parvati are introduced. The story is highly inspiring. It is a proof of the power of poetry to inspire men above their psychological weaknesses. Woman is the greatest weakness of man and it might prove a hindrance in the way of Rama at any stage. Sage Vishvamitra is deep beyond our imagination. He is leading Rama into a forest which was once a blooming countryside. The woman-monster, Tadaka, had laid it waste. It was in the interest of humanity that the woman-monster should be killed. The sage foresaw Rama's deep-rooted sentiments against killing a woman. In sarga twentyfive, the woman-monster proves formidable. The sage's suspicions are true. Rama's hesitation to kill a woman proves a great handicap. The sage brings to our knowledge two stories from the remotest past, wherein Indra and Vishnu had killed women who were enemies of mankind. These stories are lost to us, for no puranic writers or poets took up these stories in later literature. In sarga twentysix, Tadaka is killed and the sage is happy to impart knowledge of highly mysterious weapons to Rama. In sarga twentyseven, Rama has practical instructions in the use of these weapons. These weapons appear before Rama, and acknowledge him as their master. In sarga twenty eight, Rama learns other weapons which could serve as antidotes to such powerful weapons used by the enemy. Names of these later weapons are inspiring. They recall the untiring activities of a man determined to set up an order of good by dispelling evil. A few of the names may be translated as, Truthful; one whose fame is based on truth, overpowered; speed; revenge with opposed face; with face diverted; the fixed target and the target-less, with strong navel, with beautiful navel, the ten-eyed, the hundred-faced, the ten-headed, the hundred-bellied, the lotus-navelled, the large-navelled, sounding-navelled, and the self-navelled, of light, of birds, without a face, the purified, carrying the yoke, without sleep, killing the monsters, the pure-armed and the mighty-armed and many more. The very names of these would make a hero of a

man and when Rama is trained in the use of these, every one is happy.

In sarga twenty-nine, Rama reaches Siddhashrama. The sage tells him how that place was sometimes a penance grove of Vishnu who was requested by rishis and gods to be born as Vamana or the Dwarf man, and to protect humanity against Bali's plans to conquer the whole earth. The sage Kashyapa, who had by this time finished his serious penances, had appealed to Vishnu to accept him as His father. Vamana was born and Bali was thrown down into the lower world by the three steps of Vishnu.

Immediately after the inspiring legend of the Vamana-Incarnation of Vishnu traversing the Universe in three strides, Rama is faced with the monsters who had ever been disturbing Vishvamitra's last great sacrifice which was, probably, a symbol of the sage's last extensive measures for the spread of Aryan civilisation. Like Vishnu, Rama is to grow mighty in three steps. He had killed Tadaka, and after victoriously dealing with Maricha and Subahu, he has to go to Mithila to break the great bow. This last great deed of breaking Shiva's bow, makes Rama look mightier than before in the eyes of all. His father, king Dasharatha, who had regarded him as a tender boy so far, is made to witness the repetition of the last event, when Rama wields another mighty bow offered as a test by the ascetic warrior Rama, son of Jamadagni. To announce the infinite powers of Rama, the elderly sage Rama adores our hero as the promised one, Godhead incarnate and full grown Man.

Thus in sarga thirty, sage Vishvamitra starts his long-postponed sacrifice. The princes guard him, when he is observing silence, while rishis offer oblations to fire and recite vedic hymns. The two monsters with a large number of followers invade on the sixth day. Maricha is thrown off to fall into the distant sea by Rama's arrows, and Subahu is killed. Sage Vishvamitra completes his week's vow of silence, and accomplishes the greatest object of his life, namely to be a Siddha.

Rama has earned the gratitude of the sages by killing Subahu and throwing away Maricha. The Rishis look up to him as the promised saviour. There is only one trial left for him. He is to break the Bow which shall establish him as the mightiest man of his times. The rishis and the princes are soon on their way to Mithila in sarga thirty one.

Sage Vishvamitra is happy to discover Rama's greatness. He is in a mood to tell all about places and men that related to the sage's own life. The next three sargas, from thirtytwo to thirty four, are a history of the early settlements of some of the Aryan tribes. Whatever we might say of the value of historical evidence in the *Ramayana*, Valmiki has once for all, preserved for us the conditions of earlier Aryan society. The pioneers of Aryan civilisations lived as the Brahmins, who were great intellectuals devoted to the cause of supreme knowledge. As times advanced, these patriarchs ordered their sons to be warriors and to establish states in order to maintain the tree of life in the struggle for existence. Birth of the warrior-race was the need of the times. The great Kusha had all his five sons bound for the warriors' life. They built great cities and added prosperity to the country. What Vishvamitra told Rama about his own family might be true of many others. The Brahmana sages were followed by generations of warriors, holy warriors and Raj-rishis to whom Indian culture owes its origin. The historical portion is here full of charms. The story of Vishvamitra's sister Kaushiki, after whom was named the holy river Kosi flowing through Magadha, modern Bihar, is quite touching. The sage has ever loved to be on the banks of the river which embodies the good soul of the sage's noble sister. It is here we know that in the poet's mind, Nature and man were so intimately related.

The story of Kushanabha's hundred daughters refusing to be molested by god Vayu, is not without a purpose. Aeschylus, the Greek dramatist, has also given a similar story where a hundred daughters of Danaus run in fear of violence to their chastity by a god. The stories on the way to Mithila are no more stories of adventure and chivalry. Rama has proved his valour. His growth should not be lopsided. He must know human nature before he is married. Kushanabha's hundred daughters record the one great virtue of womanhood namely, the power to stand against temptation. 'Kshama', or disciplined chastity, is essential for maintaining the healthy institution of marriage. Value of Tapas and Yajna, or asceticism and sacrifice, is deeply impressed through these stories of the *Ramayana*. Vishvamitra's father Gadhi, we are told, was born after a sacrifice for progeny had been performed. The great sage, too, had performed great penances, but he is silent about the deeds of his youthful days.



The party goes to sleep in the valley surrounded by the five hills, and we have a fine specimen of poetry describing the rising of the moon in the dark midnight.

Sargas thirtyfive to thirtyseven relate one of the oldest Nature-myths. The mountain, Himavant, begets two daughters. The elder is Ganga who is besought by gods for heavenly regions. She is transformed into a celestial river. The younger is Uma who, through her great penances, is able to wed Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva in amorous sports with Uma, is excited, but the gods request the Lord to maintain His Virile fluids within Himself, so that the three worlds may not be destroyed through emission of that great energy in recklessness. The disturbed portion of this energy is directed towards the earth. Gold, silver copper, iron, lead, zinc, tin and other metals are born of this energy as it cools gradually. Uma, finding her Lord's energy being carried away by the earth through the gods' conspiracy, curses the gods to be without children in future. In the meantime, god Agni enters this thrown-off energy of Lord Shiva and keeps the foetus alive. Ganga is requested to maintain this foetus in her womb. She transforms herself into a woman and receives the embryo. She is incapable of preserving the great energy within her, and there is a miscarriage. The energy flows out through her currents, and springs are full of gold and other metals, so much so, that all plants and herbs grow rich in these elements. The embryo is again preserved by Agni and Kumar Kartikeya is born as lustrous as gold itself in the forest-of-fire. The constellation of Krittika, O'Gama, having six stars acts as the nurse. Earth is Uma, the daughter of the Mountain, and Shiva is the Sun-god. Krittika, or O'Gama was once the equinoctial constellation where, as also recorded in the *Surya Siddhanta*, India's and the world's first astronomical treatise, the Moon enters after the full Moon day of equinox. On this day, the Sun, during its southward passage from the zodiacal sign Cancer to Capricornus, reaches the mid-point or the beginning of the region below the Equator. The northern path is the path of the gods as is well known through the Gita and the Upanishads. The Southern region is the abode of Asuras or the forces of destruction. The earth receives a flood of energy from the Sun, during these Krittika days, when the sun enters the region of Asuras. In mythical language, the gods have a victory over the asuras or the forces of



darkness on this day. Krittika has six stars and modern astronomy gives the same number. This nature-myth clothes the revelations in the Veda that the Sun as Mitra and Varuna deposits divine creative energy in waters, meaning that process of life work in the presence of water and fire. Besides embodying an astronomical fact and probably some pre-historical event, the myth has preserved a piece of information current in the poet's age. All metals were regarded as embodiment of the same energy. The rocks that received this energy in higher degrees produced gold and those which received it less produced next grades like silver and copper. We may see here a forethought of a table based on atomic weight. Some great scientific age had given the knowledge in popular form, and the poet was passing that on to us.

Sarga thirty-eight to forty-four, relate the story of king Sagara, who was an ancestor of Rama. He had two wives. One gave birth to Asamanjas who was banished for throwing young boys into the river, and the other gave birth to sixty thousand sons. King Sagara performed the Horse-sacrifice. The Horse was stolen by Indra, and was left at a far-off place in the east, where the great sage Kapila was absorbed in contemplation. Sagara's sons ransacked the earth, digging every yojana—about five miles—, of it. They tore the earth deep, and the sea was bound within its shores. The name Sagara for the sea was, thus, a reminiscence of the great event. Sagara's sons went to the four directions and found the four quarters protected by divine elephants, or perhaps the four mountain ranges. In the meantime, earthly creatures who were so callously trampled and tortured by the marching armies of Sagara's sons, appealed to gods for help. Gods approached the Creator, Brahma, who told them to wait for the moment when these sixty thousand sons would be burnt to ashes by sage Kapila's wrath. So it happened, for, when Sagara's sons reached the hermitage, the sage burnt them to ashes by his great power. The sacrifice, however, was completed, but the pangs of this great calamity were deep in the hearts of Sagara and his later descendants who, generation after generation, performed penances for bringing down the holy Ganga to the plains to anoint the ashes of these sixty thousand departed warriors. Some generations died in the effort, and finally Bhagiratha was able to please the gods by his great penances, and brought down Ganga that

previously flowed heavenward. These ashes were purified near the place where Ganga meets the sea.

The legend may be a poetic interweaving of history and nature-myth, but it certainly records some historical and geographical events of remote times. Geography today confirms that some rivulets forming the mighty currents of Ganga in the mountains, and most of the tributaries of Ganga in Bengal show that engineering skill and human labour have contributed much in the remote past in the shaping of their courses. Valmiki's details of the three western currents, with the Indus as the central, and three eastern currents with Brahmaputra as the eastern most one, are the same as Geography teaches us today. We can only wonder at this piece of geological knowledge given by the poet. The mythically large number of years of penance done by these kings who dedicated their lives to this great task of turning the course of the Ganga, might be a poetic invention to link the geological event of thousands of years ago to the lives of a few heroes of the Solar race, who, perhaps, in times gone by had planned to turn the course of some tributaries to form the main stream as it is today. The large number of sons might denote an army devoted like sons to Sagara's cause.

Other details in the Ganga-legend are only apparently mythical. Ganga was lost in Shiva's hair. Perhaps this refers to a thinner current being scattered in the wild forests and valleys between mountains. The beautiful narration about the birth of the holy Ganga, as preserved for us by the great poet in relation to human endeavours is for awakening in the people a national sentiment for the land and its rivers. The story is inspiring. The site of the hermitage of Kapila even to this day is a holy place of pilgrimage for thousands of Indians every year at the time of the winter solstice. These legends record growth and education of the greatest hero of India in those days that were echoing with mighty deeds of the earlier giant-men of our race. Great cities had been built by men before Rama. The great River was a gift of his ancestors for the people of the land. Rama was to emulate those early architects of Aryan Civilisation, who by planned labour for generations were able to perform superhuman feats.

As a poet, Valmiki adds charm to his note of auspiciousness by singing of the beauty of Nature in her childhood. The myths of the Balakandam recall that early uncovering of the face of

Nature which besides being a call to man for a struggle, has always been a source of eternal urge in him to create an order of beauty around him. The clear sky, the stars which first marked outlines of Nature's face were dear to the poet, but dearer and more auspicious were Ganga and Uma, for their beauty and divine grace. Beauty of life around earth, accomplishment of Nature in the birth of Ganga, the holiest of rivers, promise of protection from the benign Goddess Uma in the birth of Kumara, and penances of the great sages like Vishvamitra, had made the land blessed enough to wait for the birth of Rama.

Moreover, the poet in these stories is giving us a study of the eternal relationship between man and nature. Both had to face obstacles in their growth. Vishnu and Indra in the Vedas had delivered the earth from the impending chaos. Rama was to deliver mankind from the impending evil. Life of Nature was as real for the poet as the life of man. He saw reflection of Nature in the thoughts and actions of the human race. His description of the war between good and evil, was embodied in the symbols of Nature as much as in the symbols of human life.

Gods, as forces of Nature, had their Saviour in Vishnu, so was humanity to have her Saviour in the Perfect Man. It was, thus, a unique moment in the history of the Aryans in India which Valmiki was inspired to sing. Humanity and Nature were delivered together in the birth of Rama, the Highest Man. Before Rama enters Ayodhya, as the husband, as beloved heir to the throne, and the full-grown blossom of the tree of humanity, he had grown tall enough to embody the full might of Vishnu.

Sarga fortyfive relates the legend of churning of the ocean by Devas and Asuras, with Mandara as the churning rod and snake Vasuki as the churning rope. The Devas and Asuras were both desirous of immortality, and they were churning the milky ocean for nectar. A deadly poison came out of the ocean as well as the snake's mouth. Lord Shiva drank it off and saved the world from this great poison. After the poison, came six hundred millions of mermaids—undoubtedly the stars—out of the ocean, but neither the Devas nor the Asuras accepted them as their companions. In the meantime, the mountain Mandara was sinking into the ocean. Vishnu in the form of a Tortoise supported it on His back and held it straight with His hand. Dhanvantari, the celestial physician, was born with medicinal herbs. Then came out Varuni,



the Sura or Wine, which Devas accepted as their companion, and for that association, were known as the Suras. While both the groups were dead tired, the nectar was carried away by Vishnu who confounded every one by his divine personality, vanquishing those who chased him for the nectar. The Devas killed the Asuras and became immortals. Indra was now the ruler of the universe, with rishis and gods as his followers.

The churning of the ocean in one way refers to the motion of the earth by which the sun apparently moves north and south. Devas here represent forces of Life against Asuras, the forces of Chaos. Before the dawn of human life, some misty poisonous vapour must have collected in the atmosphere. The milky ocean is, in fact, nothing but the atmosphere. Birth of Dhanvantari, the Divine physician, out of the churned ocean is the birth of the lord of the herbs. It may be noted here that one of the pioneers of Ayurveda or the science of medicine is Soma, which is another name of the Moon, whose name is also Dhanvantari. Later Puranas give a confused version of this myth and the tradition, and describe birth of the Soma or the Moon after Dhanvantari. Valmiki's myth is the original, where he gives the name Dhanvantari to the Lord of herbs and plants. Probably the word in his days referred to the Moon as the Satellite with its Dhanu or the Orbit within the earth's elliptic.

Still, however, the myth is too old, and here is certainly some element of history of earlier struggle between races. It was meant to inspire Rama who had to choose his side with the good in the way of the older hero Vishnu.

Sarga fortysix relates how Diti, the mother of Asuras, — no doubt the southern hemispheres and the seas, — was sad at the death of her sons. She sought a boon from her husband, Kashyapa, to be blessed with a son who might be able to defeat Indra, her step-son. She performed penances for a thousand years, while Indra attended her with devotion. Ten years before the completion of her vow, she told Indra about the boon. One noon, while she lay with her head towards the foot-side of the bed, Indra entered her womb. He cut the foetus into seven parts, and while it cried, the mother woke. Indra came out and told the step-mother, what he had done. She realised her mistake in being asleep in the wrong manner and told Indra to have these



seven Maruts, or the winds born out of the foetus, as his followers.

In the story of Indra's smashing his step-brother who would have vanquished him, we find a call for a determined action, against an enemy at the earliest stage, or to nip the evil in the bud, as our modern idiom goes. Besides the inspiration for strong action, the story has some lost reference to the natural phenomena of the Sun's motion in the northern path of the Sun. The Sun strikes the slumbering winds and clouds hidden under the cavity of the sky away from the path or in the South into various kinds of winds. The birth of Maruts or the emerging of winds like the monsoons out of thick water-holding clouds is a vedic revelation which the poet has recorded as a legend in the popular language of his day.

The childhood of Nature however mythically represented, makes the stories of Balakandam a well-linked background for the birth and growth of the perfect man. In this simultaneous growth of Nature and Man, the poet is probably discovering a strange link between the evolution in Nature and Man. When Nature is in accelerated throes, humanity is dynamically adjusting itself to new courses in its advance. Man, in fact, is a part and parcel of Nature and imbibes progress-complexes from the same unseen forces which animate Nature surrounding him. An age of climax in civilisation is more or less an effect of some climax conditions within a grade of evolution in Nature. Nature and human race mark this stage of evolution in their own ways. Valmiki was observing such reciprocal progress-complexes in Nature and man in the age of *Ramayana*. Mighty rivers were born and new forces in Nature were manifesting themselves to persons gifted with vision. To a modern mind, a natural phenomenon is a matter of study for the scientists who give it in the shape of a mathematical formula. In those earlier days, of which the *Ramayana* is a poetic record, a poet had a claim to the study of the life of Nature, and he gave his observations in the form now known as Nature-myth.

In sarga fortyseven, Vishvamitra tells Rama and Lakshmana about the city of Vishala which they had reached by now. Indra once lived there and later this city was founded by a family of Ikshvaku kings. In sarga fortyeight is told the story of Indra's violence to the chastity of Gautama's wife, Ahalya, while the

sage Gautama was away for a bath. Ahalya discovers Indra in the guise of her husband, but accepts Indra's love. Indra is leaving the hermitage after the crime, when Gautama enters. Finding what had happened during his absence, he curses Indra. He also curses his wife to be turned to a stone and remain in that condition performing penances till Rama would come to that place. In sarga forty nine, Ahalya is again transformed into a woman on Rama's approach to that hermitage. She receives Rama with respect and goes to join her husband in the mountains. This nature-myth describes some changes which Gautama's country might have undergone due to heavy rains in by-gone ages.

Ahalya means 'the land which cannot be ploughed'. Indra stands for rains. An obscure history about the holy ashrama once being rendered bare to a rocky bed by heavy rainfalls, is rendered into a myth wherein it regains its fertility and beauty through Rama's grace after a lapse of time. This is one of the many popular legends in which jealous might is mythically represented as Indra, the King of Heaven, for whose sake Vishnu killed Asuras in the wars between Devas and the Asuras, and who pounded his step-brother in the embryonic stage to have the seven Maruts as his followers. He is jealous of over-ambitious rivals and those who seek to attain Heaven through sacrifices, penances and meritorious deeds, and sets trials and temptations in the way of outshining success. King Sagara's warrior hordes were made to ransack sage Kapila's Ashrama only because the sacrificial horse, as related above, was misled by Indra to sage Kapila's hermitage, and as narrated, Vishvamitra's penances were liquidated by heavenly nymphs like Menaka and Rambha set by Indra's command to distract Vishvamitra from penances. In all these myths, Indra as the chief character, is introduced as the heavenly or the unknown cause for which those who make unduly desperate endeavours to rise above the weaknesses of flesh and blood are made to realise how full of psychological risks such endeavours are.

In this relevance, Indra's violence to the chastity of Ahalya, sage Gautama's wife, is a legend about the distractions that aesthetic appeal sets for this God of glorious achievements. Gautama's Ashrama was once a well-known, prosperous centre of education

and penance. Some unpleasant incident like an autocrat's lusty excursions into that sacred place to seduce simple-minded and unguarded beauty, is indeed reflected in this nature-myth. The Ashrama now lay deserted and ruined. The unhappy episode must have called forth Vishvamitra's reflection on the stuff of which humanity is made. The Chief of the gods, as well as the most devoted wife of one of the greatest sages, were temptible. Ahalya's transformation in Rama's presence, however, convinces Rama that the perennial purity of the soul never fails to redeem penitent men and women. The poet, perhaps, is leaving a shadow of an irony in his story. Rama, who had absolved a woman from her sins by his graceful touch, could not help his beloved wife Sita against an unfortunate, capricious and unfounded scandal.

In sarga fifty, the party reaches Mithila. Janaka comes to receive the sage and is happy to see the two young heroes of a great family.

The next fifteen sargas, from fiftyone to sixtyfive, develop the theme of Vishvamitra's great penances. In the subtle imagery of myths, the *Ramayana* records detailed versions of how warriors sometimes committed aggressions against holy ashramas of the Vedic times. While coming back from his world-conquering expedition, king Vishvamitra was welcomed by Vasishtha in the forest. The king and his army were generously served with a large variety of dishes. The king was surprised to find such liberal arrangements being made by an ascetic. On inquiring, the fact was found that all this was arranged by a Cow—indeed a mythical representation of the rich and beautiful Ashrama where the land, the pastures and the cows were capable of granting everything. The king asked the sage to surrender the Cow to him; for all valuables indeed should be the property of the king. Vasishtha refused. The king and his army laid waste the hermitage, but the sage was patient enough, till Vishvamitra discharged the deadliest of weapons against him. Vasishtha's anger being aroused, he was about to hurl his staff at the king, when there was a stir in the universe. Vishvamitra retired to the forests for penance. The story of his penance is long. He was interrupted by Menaka, the celestial nymph whom he loved for a year. Recovering, he continued penance and was once more disturbed by Rambha, another celestial nymph. He cursed her and found that anger was as great a weakness as love. Finally, he was exalted to the status of a Raj-



Rishi while in the meantime, he helped Trishanku to go to heaven alive. He is described to have shown great spiritual powers. He created the southern constellations to form a new heaven of Indra. Finally, Vishvamitra was a Brahmarshi, who was now settled as the undisturbed, wisest sage of his times.

The story of Vishvamitra's determined pursuit of a noble goal in the face of repeated handicaps is inspiring. Rama's growth under such a saintly teacher could not be complete without such inspiring stories. Sarga sixtysix gives a description of a heavy bow. In sarga sixty seven, the great Bow is broken by Rama, and there is a great rejoicing by Janaka and his people.

Sargas sixtyseven to seventyfour give a detailed description of the formalities of an Indian marriage. Rama had broken the bow, but he could not give his consent for the marriage. All talks of marriage should be through the elders. King Dasharatha is informed at Ayodhya, and he is happy to come to Mithila at his earliest convenience. There is a great cordiality between the two kings, who are epitomes of culture and good manners. King Dasharatha, though older, is happy to honour king Janaka as the man who is offering Sita as a gift to Dasharatha's son. In all formalities, the choice of initiative is left to the bride's father. This tradition is still alive in India, where marriage is not a unitary relation between husband and wife, but a link between two families or even the two groups or castes to which the bride and the bridegroom belong.

Indian marriage is performed with Vedic rites, and with hymns from the Vedas. Before the final giving away of the bride by her father, the priest on the side of the bridegroom has to sing aloud the genealogy of the family starting with the name of the vedic Rishi who was the earliest patriarch of the family. The same is done by the other priest on behalf of the bride's family. This is done in the marriage of Sita and Rama. Then is the final marriage ceremony performed. Janaka joins Sita's hand with the bridegroom's hand. The feasts and gifts of luxuries are given by the bride's father. Charity is given to the Brahmanas and the poor. Gift of cows to the priests accompanies Rama's marriage. Even today, cow or a nominal money-value, is given to the priest in charge of the ceremony. These details of Rama's marriage make the *Ramayana* a beloved scripture for Indians who listen with great joy to every little detail of the ceremonial of these days. A Hindu



is honestly proud of finding these traditions in the remotest past sanctified by association with the brightest hero of India.

In Sarga seventyfour, sage Rama, the son of Jamadagni, appears on the stage. He is furious and offers Rama another equally great Bow to work. Rama is able to stretch the Bow of Lord Vishnu. In sarga seventyfive, sage Rama adores prince Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu, and departs. In sarga seventysix, all return to Ayodhya.

The fore-going analysis is a proof of the genuineness of the Balakandam as a well-planned structure. The beginning was probably the poet's greatest concern. It is here that we find a great architect in the author of the *Ramayana*. The poet is deeply absorbed in presenting history, thought and culture of an age earlier than Rama's. He completely withdraws his personality from his poem. The hand that carves the shape of the theme is invisible.

The title of the first book as "The Balakandam" is significant. It is not the childhood of Rama alone, but of Godhead, Nature and Man at the same time. Apparently artless, the poet is seriously engaged through strong touches and subtle shades, in shaping the growing trinity of Godhead, Nature and Man in every little episode of his narration.

### Chapter III

## INDIAN TRI-MURTI

### OR

## BRAHMA, VISHNU AND MAHESHA

In his complex role as a vedic seer and as visionary of the vedic civilisation set for spreading far and wide through the coming ages, Valmiki reveals Godhood in more benign and human aspects than the sternly lawful vedic gods like Indra and Varuna. He sets on his task of composing the *Ramayana* under an affectionate word of inspiration from Brahma, and inaugurates the war-epic in the *Ramayana* with Rama's installation and worship of Shiva-lingam or the Shiva-stone at Rameshwaram. In this subtle way, the *Ramayana* of Valmiki glorifies the supreme Divinity as the Tri-Murti. As handed down by Valmiki, this Tri-Murti is based on still more ancient traditions. Various hymns of the Rig Veda separately sing of the Supreme Power as Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva. The concept of Tri-Murti, however, looks at the One Supreme Being as a triangular unit. Going beyond the number 'one' in the Vedic God Indra, and the number 'Two' in the pairs of Gods like Indra-Agni, and Mitra-Varuna, or the Twin Gods Ashvins, the poetic genius of the earliest ages looks for the 'Three' as the more comprehensive aspects of Divinity. The concept of Tri-Murti embodies the dimensions of the three worlds known as Bhur, Bhuvah, and Svah. It is a vision of the Three qualites known as Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The concept is aesthetic as well as philosophic. It paints a colourful, well-featured Divinity and provokes thought for meditating on a well-disposed Godhood. It symbolises life in its three-fold processes of creation, continuation, and culmination. It is an eloquent urge of the human race for perfection through creativity, action and concentration. Having been the most popular concept through ages, it records how humanity aspires for the freedom of the soul

through a harmony of the emotional, dynamic and reflective aspects of the human mind.

Brahma is the freedom of the Soul through creativity. The 'Pitamaha', or the Grandsire seated on the stalked Lotus, is the everfresh process of creation going on in Nature, Life and Art. Being the limitless or the unmanifested 'Avyakta', this creative effort is beautifully suggested in the Vedas as 'Ka' meaning 'who?' Being full knowledge, He is called the "Hiranyagarbha" or the Womb of Light that is Golden Wealth. Brahma is the four-faced Sage who reads the Mystic Words of creation, from the Four Vedas. As the poet, 'Kavi', He is 'Svayambhu' or the self-born. With 'Savitri' or the Propelling inspiration for His Spouse, Brahma has the white Graceful Swan for his heavenward flights. This Red-faced Deity of the Rising Sun, sets aglow the talent in poetry, philosophy, learning spiritual cults, arts and crafts. As the Creator of worlds, He is also the Vidhi, or the Ordainer of destiny, for all creatures. In the beauty of colours and delicacy of creative purity, the Lotus, the Swan and the Dawn associated with Brahma represent the sprouting, the spreading and the brightening of life that make creation a holy ritual. As the Grand-sire, Brahma shares the sorrows of mankind when destructive forces impede progress of life, and catastrophes threaten to annihilate creation.

Vishnu is the central Deity in the Tri-Murti. From Him springs the sap that runs through the stalk of Lotus on which Brahma is seated. He is the freedom of the soul through actions that protect Life and Laws. He incarnates, when monstrous evil threatens life and violates Laws. He is a friend of the virtuous, and as the Gita proclaims, is born in every age to destroy those who plan and work to exterminate righteousness. Vishnu is the Merciful Redeemer of mankind. Reclining on the thousand-headed and the thousand-coiled serpent-Infinity or the Sheshnaga — the four-armed Vishnu is ever armed to command to harmony the wayward play of the ocean of life. Noble warriors, pioneers, adventurers, disciplined men of mighty deeds, social workers and reformers, philanthropists, saints and humble devotees reflect the large-heartedness of Vishnu. Wealth as Lakshmi rubs Vishnu's feet wherein lies the salvation or the Eternal freedom for all. Mighty wings of 'Garuda', the majestic eagle, carry Vishnu with terrific speed to wherever there is a threat to Dharma or the

Holy Laws. As redeemer of sorrows of mankind and as preserver of life-processes, Vishnu is associated with the Moral Order which He maintains through equations of the movement of the Earth with respect to the Sun, the Moon and the Heavenly world of constellations. Through His Might, he readjusts the cycle of seasons by bringing the Earth to the equinoctial position and readjusting the equinoxes with respect to the starry world. He is, therefore, adored by the astronomers and mathematicians for whom he is the Teacher of Teachers, having in the beginning of creation revealed knowledge to the Sun-God, the Seven seers and the Manus, and incarnates age after age to instruct man to fight for the cause of righteousness.

Seated on the high-peaked Mountain that symbolises height attained and kept, Shiva, known also as Rudra in the Vedas, is the beauty of the soul in the Tri-Murti. He is the freedom through the will that arises out of Supreme Control and Supreme Bliss. The meditative pose of Shiva represents concentrated Intellect that is free from ignorance and passion. His Three Eyes reflect the ever-running consciousness that links past, present and the future. The serpent coiled around Lord Shiva's azure neck indicates the beauty of restraint in speech and Prana-shakti or the breathing functions. The holy Ganga flowing from His head marks the purificatory task of intellect, while the crescent Moon on the Forehead is the illumination that Intellect sheds all around. Countless shining worlds in the sky at night move to this Lord of the North before they appear again in the East. Thus the Lord of Destruction is the Goal of all shining souls who, having perfected themselves as Yogis, mystics, sanyasis, recluses and ascetics, ever repeat within their minds Omkar or the syllable OM as the holiest of His names. With 'Parvati', the Daughter of the Mountain as His Spouse, the Lord of stern Duty rides the Sturdy Bull for his excursions to plant bliss in the visions of the toiling humanity.



*Chapter IV***AYODHYA KANDAM****I****A SUMMARY**

While engaged in creating a picture of Ayodhya surging with hopes of Rama's coronation, Valmiki muses over the dignity of human relations and the grace of cultured urbanity in ancient India. Poetry that sang so buoyantly of the pioneers of the race runs in soberer reflections over every day problems of nobler men and women connected with the state. Soft melodies of a flowing verse narrate the stir of a people on the eve of a great occasion. The beloved prince who was an embodiment of virtue and might, was now to be crowned as the King of Ayodhya. Blessed Sita's husband was to be announced as the Lord of the Earth. In queen Sumitra's words, the worthy son of Kaushalya would be Lord of royal glory or 'Shri' like Vishnu with whom the prince had grown identified in the minds of the people. Preparations that would fain express joy of the people on the fulfilment of their long-cherished dream were afoot everywhere in the streets of Ayodhya.

That very evening, an ill-bred advice of state-craft cast a gloomy shadow over the royal palace of Kaikeyi, the most beloved of the queens. Manthara, a hunchback slave from Kaikeyi's parental home, had lived long with her queen as an inmate of the palace. She was shocked to find unprecedented preparations going around the palace, where nothing was known about the cause of the celebrations. Knowing Rama would be crowned the next morning, she was sick with jealousy and infected Kaikeyi's mind with a malicious distrust of the King's intentions. She did not rest till noble Kaikeyi, who had never made any difference between Rama and her son Bharata, saw

eye to eye with her. What a wretched life was in store for her, if Rama was to be the King and Bharata only a liegeman attending the elder brother.

Manthara depicted the horrors of a life, when Kaikeyi would be a non-entity in the State. She reminded the queen that Dasharatha had never been sincere to her, and Kaushalya had been, in fact, the king's real favourite all the time. If coronation was not stopped, Kaushalya would be the real ruler through her son Rama.

Frightened out of her wits, Kaikeyi was willing to be guided by the hunchback. She wondered how Manthara's worth and grace were not discovered so far. Ambition drew a happy picture of the future, when Bharata would be the king, Rama a forgotten and frustrated exile, and the other queens left languishing in sorrow. Manthara, no more a slave in those happy times, would move about laden with jewellery fit for queens.

The king returned from the court happy with hopes of celebrating the coronation the next morning. The palace of his beloved queen was found deserted. Rightly was there an ill-boding in the surroundings, when Kaikeyi was found lying on the ground determined to fast unto death. She had been promised two boons, and now was the time for her to demand them. Rama should be banished and Bharata crowned in his place. The king was unwilling to believe that such a doom awaited him in his beloved queen's palace. He cried, prayed, cursed and beat his head to implore the queen for letting things remain as they were. He had pledged long ago to grant her two wishes, but it was most wicked on her part to make him look so disgraced that day in the eyes of the people. Rama was too loving and noble a son to suffer an exile. Accursed was his fondness for this unworthy queen, who had a heart of stone under a smiling face. Come what might, the wish could not be granted.

The queen was obstinate and challenged the king's claim to truthful conduct. The pledge must be honoured. Tears and swoonings of the old king failed to move her. The night was spent in curses and appeals. At dawn came Sumantra, the faithful minister, to announce to the king that all was ready for the coronation, and the king should have graced the occasion by the time. The king was lying speechless, when the queen ordered the minister to present Rama to the king. The king endorsed the

queen's command and Sumantra passed through the crowd of people to call on Rama in the early morning hour.

The gentry gathered before Rama's palace were anxiously waiting for the king's arrival. Sumantra had to come back to tell the king of their presence. The king would not stir but he asked the minister to carry out the previous command. The minister ran past the inquiring crowds and conveyed the royal message to Rama and Sita, who were waiting to come out for the ceremonies. Rama ascended the car and proceeded to see the King, while ladies crowded in balconies to throw flowers on the beloved prince, envying Queen Kaushalya whose son was so glorious.

Paying respects to his father and to Kaikeyi, Rama found the king in a strange, desolate state. The Queen asked Rama to pledge obedience to the king's command, before the command was declared to him. A fourteen years' exile was decreed for Rama and he was to leave for the forest without delay.

Rama was unperturbed and was willing to do as commanded. Kingship would not be his ambition, and he would soon leave for the forest to save the king's honour. In the meantime, news leaked out and Lakshmana followed Rama, while the latter went to Kaushalya to break the sad news.

Kaushalya was busy in making offerings to the sacred fire. She was happy to receive Rama only to know that the table had been turned overnight. She fell down senseless, crying it would be hard for her to carry on her existence in the palace, where she had all these years been miserably ignored by the king. Her last hope for a breathing space in her life lay shattered.

Lakshmana, who had watched all this so quietly till then, gave an outburst to his fury. He was not prepared to see his brother surrender to circumstances created by a henpecked father in senile fondness for the youngest of the queens. Lakshmana would take up arms, and even if hosts were against them, would fight. He would not spare even the old father who had failed to discriminate between right and wrong. The noblest son of Dasharatha could not be deprived of a legitimate right.

Kaushalya was of the same opinion. She implored Rama not to neglect his duty to obey the mother. A son of Marichi in the past had won glorious status for his obedience to the mother. The Sea had suffered an eternal curse for ignoring a mother's

command. Rama should not relinquish his right, when he had Lakshmana's support on his side.

All this failed to move Rama. He declared himself pledged to obey the old father. He explained to Lakshmana that such events were worked by fate and none was to be held responsible for turns in fortune.

Lakshmana was unable to accept Rama's plea. He could challenge fate, and decide things by force of arms. His arms were not merely a decoration. He could create a havoc in the three worlds, and would punish the old father who was doing this great injustice.

Amidst tears, Lakshmana beseeched Rama to permit him to show his valour. Rama was adamant and Kaushalya was shocked to see Rama determined to forsake them all. She could not imagine how gentle Rama would survive this long exile. Kaikeyi had brought this unbearable calamity to all of them. Rama consoled his mother in the name of Dharma and asked her to look after her old husband, when Rama would be away. Kaushalya was, after all, prevailed upon to resign to the cruel fate. The noblest of the queens was soon engaged in ceremonies to seek blessings from the protecting deities of forests for guarding Rama in his forest sojourn. A delicate trial was still awaiting Rama. He broke the news to his beloved wife who had presentiment of a doom on seeing Rama in a desolate mood. She was instructed to live in Ayodhya as a loyal relation of Bharata or Kaikeyi. Sita declared her determination to accompany Rama to the forest, for, as a wife, she had no other duty but attendance on her husband. Dangers of forest life were explained by Rama, but Sita was firm as she felt safe under Rama's protection anywhere in the world. Rama finally agreed to take her with him, feeling proud of such a worthy wife. He asked her to distribute her jewellery and fancy goods amongst Brahmanas and servants.

Lakshmana, who had followed Rama to Sita's palace, was moved to tears on seeing Sita prepare for her exile. He would also accompany Rama to look after him. Kaushalya could look after Lakshmana's mother as well, and Bharata would do no harm to them out of regard for Rama. Rama was finally moved to have Lakshmana with him and preparations were afoot for the three to proceed.

All wealth belonging to Rama was distributed amongst the



Brahmanas and the dependents. Beggars received gifts to their satisfaction. A poor Brahmana of Garga's family pleased Rama by throwing an axe at a great distance beyond the river and earned the cow-stall in that locality. The little entertainment was sufficient to show that Rama was not in the least worried over the loss of his kingdom and wealth.

The people that had gathered in the streets were worried. Seeing Sita, Lakshmana and Rama going on foot to Dasharatha's palace, the people of Ayodhya were pained beyond measure. The noble prince, who would be escorted by armies wherever he went, was to go to the forest in that solemn desolation. Sita's sight in the street was a disgrace to the royal house. Without Rama, the people would be like a tree uprooted, for Rama was the root of the tree of humanity, while other men were its fruits, flowers and leaves only. If King Dasharatha was so obstinate, the people would desert the state, and settle with their beloved prince in other regions. Bharata would find only desolate homes and ruined hearths under his regime. No sacrifice would be performed in the homes at Ayodhya, and the city would look a wilderness in the absence of Rama.

Rama heard all this, as he entered the palace of his father. The king was in a wild confusion. Being informed that Rama had distributed all his possessions amongst the Brahmanas, the king sent for all the palace-ladies along with Kaushalya and Sumitra. In his efforts to receive Rama, the king fell senseless to the ground. All the queens and inmates were deeply disturbed on seeing Rama and Lakshmana putting on hermits' garbs. The whole assembly was plunged in grief. The king was fainting everytime he rose to speak. He requested Rama to save him from this disgrace by arresting him and declaring himself the king. Kaikeyi was shamelessly obstinate, and the pledge bound the king to her in the way she liked. While the king implored Rama to stay at least for that night, Rama told him that as an obedient son, Rama would not let his father go back from his pledge. The state and its wealth now belonged to Bharata, and Rama would not stay there even for a night. Rama would not let falsehood be associated with his father's name. The forest meals of fruits, herbs and roots would do Rama more good than a comfortable life in Ayodhya.

Sumantra, the old minister, was moved to see this helpless

plight of the king. He was shocked to find Kaikeyi's determination to send Rama to the forest and bring about all this calamity on the royal family. He declared that Kaikeyi was heartless like her own mother who had once persisted so obstinately in asking Kaikeyi's father Ashvapati to declare the cause of a loud laughter in which the king had indulged in her presence. The king Ashvapati who could understand cries of the birds had laughed at the cry of an old bird, but he told his wife that to divulge the secret of bird's cries meant Ashvapati's death. Kaikeyi's mother being still obstinate, the king left her for ever. Kaikeyi had apparently inherited her mother's obstinacy, but Sumantra appealed to her to desist from her demands, and save them all from the impending doom.

King Dasharatha, too, appealed, but in vain. He ordered Sumantra to provide all princely retinue and wealth for Rama during the exile. Kaikeyi did not tolerate this. She would not accept a deficit state left for Bharata. She reminded the king of his ancestor Sagara, who had banished his son Asamanjas. Those present were startled to see this callousness of Kaikeyi's heart. One of the old ministers, Siddhartha, warned Kaikeyi that her cruelty would ruin the state and that Bharata would not accept kingship, when Rama was in exile.

Agitation by the ministers was followed by Rama's preparations in serious earnest. He had determined to go in the forester's garb with an axe and a spade. The bark garments were put on, but when Sita received a bark garment for her, she was overwhelmed with grief and the palace was a scene of crying and cursing. Sage Vasishtha was enraged to see Sita put on the wild dress. He declared that Sita was not banished, and, if she was accompanying her husband voluntarily, she had a right to go in royal robes and ornaments, and everyone present endorsed Vasishtha's opinion.

The king ordered rich jewellery and fine dresses to be sent with her so that she might feel no dearth of good clothes for all these years. Kaushalya embraced her daughter-in-law and advised her to be a good wife in Rama's exile. Sita convinced them all that she knew well that a wife was an inseparable part of her husband's life. Like moonlight which never exists without the Moon, or like a guitar which could never be an instrument for music without its strings, Sita could not live without Rama. Her hus-

band was, in fact, the God of her heart and she would spare no pains to maintain his honour.

Sumitra, too, embraced Lakshmana and advised him to serve Rama with devotion. The three ascended the chariot and, while the king, the queens and the crowds that had come to watch the coronation ran after the chariot lamenting and cursing their lot, Rama asked the charioteer to speed up. The royal personages returned home, while the people followed Rama. While they ran, they cried that the dearest and noblest prince was leaving them. The planets were dark, and hurricanes raged in the sea, and the sky was gloomy all around on the day when Rama left, and those who stayed behind neither ate nor slept that night.

The king's sorrow was beyond description and so was Kaushalya's.

Noble Sumitra consoled Kaushalya telling her that Rama would make a name wherever he would go. The people who had followed Rama so far, could not be persuaded to go back. The old Brahmanas appealed to Rama not to desert the people like this. By evening they had all come to the bank of Tamasa river, where all slept on the ground. Rama got up earlier, and asked Sumantra to ford the river before others would be awake. The people cursed themselves for having slept so long, and returned to Ayodhya having failed to catch the trail of Rama's chariot. Women reproached their husbands for having returned without Rama. They were alarmed to be in Ayodhya without Rama, for Kaikeyi who had been so cruel to the princes would only be callous towards the people. In the meantime, Rama, while passing through the countryside, heard people cursing the king and Kaikeyi for having banished Rama. Reaching Gomati, Rama pointed to Sita the frontiers of the Kaushala State which Ikshvaku had inherited from Manu.

Crossing these borders, Rama bade good-bye to the protecting deities of his state, and repeatedly asked Sumantra to return home. The night was spent on the bank of the Ganga with Guha, the chief of Nishadas. The chief was very cordial and loyal. Sumantra was finally persuaded to leave. Rama initiated himself to forest life by knotting his hair. The Ganga was crossed with prayers to the gods. Sita, too, prayed to the Gods and promised to propitiate them, when she would return safe with her husband after exile. On the other side of the Ganga, Rama gave way to



sorrow and was restless to recall the plight of his parents in his absence.

In the morning, they came to the hermitage of Sage Bharadvaja, who was happy to see Rama after a long time. The Sage offered them his hospitality, but Rama preferred a sequestered place for his permanent abode. Chitra Kuta was suggested by the Sage. Having crossed the Yamuna river, Rama got erected a cottage for them and a hut for his arms. In the meantime, Sumantra having spent a night with the Nishada, reflected on Rama's magnanimity. Returning to Ayodhya, he conveyed Rama's parting greetings to Dasharatha. Rama had beseeched Kaushalya to resign cheerfully to her fate, and to attend on the old king. She should try to bring round Kaikeyi to look after every one with proper care. She should show regard for the young king Bharata, for kings should be shown proper respect. With tears, Rama had asked Bharata not to ignore Kaushalya who was missing her dear Rama. Lakshmana, too, had sent a message of protest against the unreasonable decision of the king. He had been furious and would not have any regard for his father, for Rama was his sole consideration in life. Sita had been overwhelmed and was speechless while she got down from the chariot with tears in her eyes. Sumantra related all this at the palace.

In Ayodhya, the King shifted to Kaushalya's palace. His cries were heart-rending. Kaushalya consoled him, but soon gave herself to despair. She recovered to attend the king, who was sinking gradually.

Death was approaching, and the king related to Kaushalya how in early youth, before he had married, he had shot the Rishi, Shravana Kumar to death on a rainy night. Hearing a bubbling sound on the Sarayu side, the king had hoped to kill an elephant. In the pride of his skill as an archer, capable of shooting at sound, the king had deprived the old and blind parents of the only son who had come to fetch water for them. The sin perpetrated in his youth had brought this expiation. The old parents of the Rishi, while they burnt themselves alive with the corpse of their son, had cursed the king to suffer a similar death in despair for a son. Having related this folly of earlier youth, the king sank down for ever amidst cries and shrieks of the queens. His corpse was preserved in oil, while Vasishtha and others were alarmed at the conditions of anarchy and decided to declare Bharata as the



king. Bharata was sent for to come without delay. Bharata took seven days to reach. The whole army, marching through countryside and fording rivers, was left behind, while Bharata rode ahead. He learnt of his mother's part in bringing about Dasharatha's death and noble Rama's exile. He cursed his mother for bringing infamy to his fair name. He was a devoted brother of Rama, and would not rest till Rama was brought back. He would have killed Manthara but showed her mercy. Before Kaushalya and the ministers, he swore in the name of Dharma, prosperity, character and grace that he never instructed his mother to seek kingship for him and exile for Rama. Preparations were immediately ordered for a march to the forest for requesting Rama to come back.

Bharata did not listen to the old sage Vasishtha who asked him to take care of the state before leaving for his search after Rama. He was ashamed of owning Kaikeyi as his mother. Sight of Kaushalya languishing for her son was unbearable for him. Sorrows of Surabhi, the Divine Cow, over her sons yoked to a plough under a scorching sun had once moved Kaushalya's heart. Similarly was moved Bharata now, when amidst sobs, he convinced all about his sincerest devotion to truth-loving Rama. Had he ever been ambitious of kingship, or if he ever had wished for Rama's exile, he would call upon the gods to strike him with sin, ignominy, sloth, and suffering of those "who serve people of low character; who make water in the direction of the sun; who strike with foot a slumbering cow; who do not pay the wages of their industrious servants; who revolt against a king devoted to the welfare of his state; who as kings collect taxes from the people without looking after their needs and protection; who, having promised bountiful fees to the priests engaged in a sacrifice, refuse to pay them; who do not know their duty in the battlefield where arms, horses, chariots and elephants are all well-arrayed; who having learnt the Vedas forget them under the influence of a disbeliever; who would never wish to see Rama in his royal glory; who enjoy sweet dishes without offering them to the gods; who touch a cow with their feet; who talk ill of their teachers; who betray their dear friends; who leak out secrets of those confiding in them; who are outcasts; who enjoy themselves while their wives and children starve; who are not fortunate to get suitable wives; who die young without progeny;

who murder a king, a child, a female or an old man; who are killed as run-away cowards; who move as idiots with begging bowls, who are addicted to wine, gambling and women; who do not feel inclined to follow virtue, and are happy in vicious conduct; who, having amassed wealth, yield it to wayfarers; who keep sleeping during mornings and evenings; who are incendiaries, and work against their comrades; who carry on incest with their teachers' wives; who have no honour and status; who are invalid, poor and have large number of children; who are destitutes and pitiable; who do not enjoy conjugal happiness with their lawful young wives; who, deserting their lawful wives, run after other women; who as brahmins fail to bring up their children properly; who throw poison in drinking water source; who do not offer water to a thirsty person; and who pronounce a partial judgement”.

Preparations were now immediately afoot for following Rama to the forest. Roads were built and forests were cleared. While Bharata, the mothers and the army moved on, Guha, the chief of Nishadas, suspected Bharata's intentions, but when Bharata cried aloud to know how Rama had slept on the ground and had kept a fast on the bank of the river Ganga, Guha joined him in his sorrow and informed Bharata of Rama's whereabouts. Bharata and his army were entertained by sage Bharadvaja on the other side of the river. Looking out from the Chitrakuta, Lakshmana saw the army and suspected an enemy marching against Rama. Arms were got ready, but Rama was patient to let Bharata approach. The memorable meeting between the two brothers was touching beyond the power of words to express. Rama was implored to go back, but all in vain. Jabali, a renowned Brahmana who requested Rama to be practical and not follow old meaningless ideals of Dharma, got a severe rebuff, when Vasishtha intervened and told Rama that Jabali was a seer and had only made the request in Rama's own interest. The party came back with Rama's 'Paduka', a footwear to be placed on the throne till Rama's return.

The encampment of the army in Chitrakuta had made the place unholy, and Rama wished to move to another place. He was told by the rishis that his presence in the forest was a temptation to Khara, Ravana's relation in the forest, to work havoc in the locality. Rama soon decided to move ahead.

## AYODHYA KANDAM

Before moving to the Dandaka forest, they came to the hermitage of Sage Atri, whose old and saintly wife Anasuya, was so happy to meet Sita. The saintly woman, who had been known for her great penance and spiritual powers, advised Sita to be a dutiful wife. Sita boldly claimed that she knew her duties well, for her birth in the family of Janaka and her status as the daughter-in-law of Dasharatha had not failed to make her a model of a wife. Sita's self-confidence and her melodious narration of her early life impressed Anasuya who gave her some rare clothes, ornaments and cosmetics which would make her a matchless beauty like Lakshmi.

## II

### LITERARY MERITS OF THE AYODHYA KANDAM

The second book of *Ramayana* is a perfect piece of art. Unity of the piece is worthy of a modern short story or a one-act play. There is only one action throughout this section of the poem, namely the action of Rama's coronation, or if one might choose to call it—a 'non-coronation'. The theme remains one till the end. The decree of Fate is announced in the beginning and the whole book runs gently on into the fathomless depths of an irrevocable catastrophe.

This impression of unity is worked by a diversity of impressions, a diversity on the largest scale ever encompassed by poetry. It appears that a virgin criticism of life in the earliest dawn of civilisation discovered a strange beauty of human character, bright with aurora colours, peeping through clouds of passion and thunders of heated agitation. The king, the queens, the princes, the ministers, the gentry and the village-folk are all noble sufferers through a caprice of Fate that callously created a situation against which none would fight even if they could. The will to suffer for the sake of a lawful order in the state and for maintaining the high name of the Ikshvaku-family creates a climax of an affair-of-state situation.

Irony of circumstance works so treacherously deep that the rank and file are all held in a vice or a grip, as if it were, unable to stir. The title of this second book as the Ayodhya Kandam, literally meaning a situation which is not to be fought against, and, apparently christening the city alone, rightly marks the critical situation that arose in the capital of Ayodhya on the eve of Rama's coronation. If the city was too well fortified against all invasions, the situation was indeed too delicate for acts of violence. A



large variety of characters is engaged in the enactment of this single event. Hosts of passions swell and subside within a couple of days. There are tears, faintings, heart-breaks and even a death. The section of the poem runs saturated with the sentiment of pathos, or the *Karuna rasa* as we call it.

Poetry in those days had not given birth to Drama, but she had certainly conceived it in the *Ayodhya Kandam* of Valmiki. Characters speak in little pieces of eloquence, and the unity of impression here is as much dramatic as lyrical. Amidst rejoicings of the people, a whisper goes around confounding every man and woman in the street and paralysing every queen and attendant in the royal palaces. The turn in the tide of life in the history of *Ayodhya* is more serious than an inroad of hellish furies. It is a bolt from the blue and the terror of a relentless fate seizes courtiers, commoners, burghers and villagers alike. The situation is as intense as can be found in any tragedy of *Aeschylus*, *Sophocles*, *Euripides* or *Shakespeare*.

But with all this unity akin to a short story, a lyric or drama, the poem does not cease to be an epic. Whereas a *Shakespeare* might have produced a *Hamlet* of *Rama*, a king *Lear* of *Dasharatha*, or even a lady *Macbeth* of *Kaikeyi*, *Valmiki* is happy to discover the scope of an epic in the firmness with which descendants of *Manu* stand amidst vicissitudes of life. The event was not merely a concern of those involved in it. It had a significance which connected it with the past. Fulfilment of *Dasharatha's* pledge was a confirmation of the spirit of truthfulness of those builders of *Arya-Dharma* whose kingdom *Dasharatha* had inherited. *Rama's* obedience to his father's command was to lay down for ever a great ideal of dedication to duty. Greatness of those human considerations rightly imparted the character of an epic to the theme, and poetry rises above the dramatic situation to sing of the glorious ideals of a race that had enriched itself with the experience of ages.

The scope for the epic is justified in the sufferings of the multitudes of people, great and small alike. Sorrow of the royal family is shared by the crowds, for the decision of their prince to abide by lawful duty was an expression of the sacred values of life that generations of humanity had cherished to preserve through all betrayals of fortune. The calm of unflinching self-denial tides over the impending doom of a terrible war in the royal house-

hold, though tremors of the tragic situation run through the length and breadth of the State. The nation-wide pathos elevates the soul more than it awes, and is a subject fit only for an epic.

Conception of character is also rightly worthy of the epic dimensions of the poem. Every character takes life as a duty. Surrender to fate here is, in fact, surrender to a high ideal only, and there is neither remorse nor desperation consequent to a Nemesis or a sin long-perpetrated. Kingship is lost for Rama, but immortality is won in that great event by all those who shared the sorrows of the royal family.

Dasharatha is glorious even in his folly. The pledge to grant two boons to the youngest of his queens for chivalrous help in a battlefield, recalls some great deeds in the hazy past of the king's life. He has been known for archery and his pride in being able to shoot at sound had made him suffer a life-long remorse for having unwittingly taken the life of a rishi in the hope of shooting an elephant in the darkness of a rainy night. He had certainly done a lot in maintaining the glory of a prosperous state and in carrying on high traditions of his ancestors. He had earned a name for himself as the paragon of virtue and righteousness and had been a custodian of Dharma for all his life. Kaikeyi charges him to be a worthy descendant of the king Sagara who had banished his son for the sake of justice. The time had come for Dasharatha to prove his honour. Nothing but an unswerving steadfastness was expected of him in the moment of trial. His despair and repulsion at the hideousness of the queen's wish to banish the dearest of his sons is in proportion to the magnitude of his fondness for her. His helpless rage, his furious and heart-rending cries and his finally disowning the queen, vindicate his good intentions for Rama. His death absolves him from all responsibility in the callous injustice done by his beloved wife.

Kaushalya's wisdom, her penance, her fasts, prayers, and her daily offerings to the sacred fire mark her as too enlightened a person to be a pitiable sufferer in a tragedy. As a mother, she is aggrieved beyond consolation, but she is very well conscious of her other duties. She is to attend ceremonies to ensure safety for Rama in the forests. She forgets her sorrows as the ignored wife, and earnestly looks after her dying husband. Her devotion as a wife speaks well of the heart of gold that she possessed.

Bharata's dedication to justice makes the whole event a land-

mark in the history of civilisation. What a shadow the kingship of Ayodhya would be when honour of the family was lost, when people would lose faith in the ruler for whose sake noble Rama had been deprived of a legitimate right. Bharata was a prince and son of a favourite queen, but he never had an ambition to usurp Rama's kingship. Temptation was out of question for this mighty son of Manu. He was an ascetic in his spirit of renunciation, and even when his mother's dream to see him a king stood realised before him, his vision of truth and justice did not forsake him. He would go and bring Rama back at all costs, or would die to vindicate his love for Rama. He was not an idle dreamer meant for a surrender to circumstances. He had a maturer judgement in every matter and could decide things for himself. He was linked with the seers of the past in his conception of virtue. His oaths were not recollection of hackneyed truths from a smiriti or a law-book. There was a freshness in his study of Dharma. His study of sin in the lives of men of all social orders was worthy of an enlightened soul. An optimism akin to spiritual faith, which is deeper than self-confidence, sustains him through the weight of new responsibilities, when despair would break any weaker heart. His self-denial is of much larger dimensions than could be the scope of a tragedy. His vision of truth and justice partakes of the nature of Eternity. His renunciation redeems his mother's fault.

The muse that sang of Kaikeyi's callousness did not see in her the monster of an evil. The most beautiful of the queens had only been a little too obstinate amidst cries of the queens, faintings of the king and curses and wailings of the people, but her stand was nothing more than a blunt claim to have her wishes granted. As a favourite queen, she had never been denied a wish. Now that the wishes were supported by a pledge, she was more obstinate than ever. Statecraft or Raj Dharma, as Valmiki calls it, anticipates such situations. King Dasharatha had created a suspicion in her mind by sending Bharata away and by keeping her out of touch with the progress of the ceremonies in connection with Rama's coronation. Her father and brother were not invited to the royal ceremony. Rama was too beloved a prince, and what was a blessing to the people of Ayodhya might mean a calamity for her. Her fate was hanging in the balance, and the warning had come to her in time. Her failure to see the magnitude of her



husband's sufferings was, to some extent, a result of too much cajolery and coaxing that she had always received from the doting king. Having taken her stand, she was resolved to face the ignominy. Such stands by favourite queens were not unprecedented.

Yet, all the time, she is herself a victim, suffering curses from all quarters. Her punishment comes when Bharata, for whose sake she had suffered an eternal calumny, disowns her and goes to restore Rama to the legitimate right. The queen who overthrows the planned happiness is only a subject of pity for the poet, and the reader's passions against Kaikeyi are as much reserved as the poet's.

There is one character who had done much to bring the Ayodhya Kandam near to a horrifying catastrophe. She is the servile hunch-back of an old maid who is fit for a villain's role in any of the world's tragedies. Shatrughna would have killed her, had she at all been worthy of a mighty Arya's rage. The destitute limping crook had been hatching hatred against joy. She was attendant on the youngest and most beautiful of the queens, and had been sick of her mistress's love-sports with an over-fond husband. She was the green-eyed monster and had accumulated malice against all forms of innocent pleasure. Celebrations on the eve of Rama's coronation agitate the dungeon in her heart. Valmiki knew that deformity in form and nature was portentous for auspicious moments. He named her Manthara, after the woman-demon who had once threatened to make humanity extinct on this earth. Vishvamitra had told Rama of the woman-monster whom Vishnu had vanquished in an earlier age, but the hero of *Ramayana* never looked upon Manthara as the cause of the sudden calamity in the royal family. He and his comrade, Lakshmana, were too great to take note of this petty messenger of fate from above. The poet only lets others laugh at her, while, in the moment of Bharata's immortal vindication of his love for Rama, she escapes with her convex back, laden with jewellery.

The poet finds other elements of an epic in the fortitude of those who leave for forest life. What would have been an irredeemable catastrophe for men under the sway of lust for life, turns out to be an event pregnant with potentialities of new glories for those who had been endowed with freshness of visions under all changes of fortune. Love and reverence for Rama in every heart compensates the gloomy reflection in the Ayodhya Kandam.



In Guha's love for Rama, we witness a depth and a spontaneity which were a prelude for all cordiality that Rama would receive from the tribes of distant regions.

The spirit of this great epic is represented in flesh and blood at the end of this book. The heroine of this piece had so far been a quiet companion of her noble husband. She had shared her husband's sorrows and had accepted a voluntary exile. Her speechless tears speak more than words, when the forester's garments were brought for her, and again when the noble exiles bade farewell to Sumantra on the borders of Ayodhya. Sita was not an ascetic and had not accepted the frowns of fate without a shock. Her willingness to suffer adds to people's sufferings, for she was made of a stuff that should better have been spared the pains of a struggle for existence. The pedestrian princess moved the people of Ayodhya to tears at the callousness of times which made them witness such a delicate frame move like an outcast. Vasishtha was enraged to see her dressed like a hermit. Chief of Nishadas and Lakshmana watched with tears this matchless beauty lying on the bank of the Ganga. She was like a child of the mother Earth, defying fate with her innocent smiles.

Her meeting with the woman-seer, Anasuya, reveals the triumph of her soul over the pains of her life. She is happy, contented, and well aware of her duties towards her exiled husband. Anasuya's advice is nothing new to her and she welcomes it only because it confirms her own conception of a devoted wife. Anasuya had been renowned for wisdom and had shared divine powers with her husband Atri who had helped Manu to rehabilitate man on Earth after the deluge. Sita's meeting with this relic of eternity is a pleasant feat of Valmiki's Muse to link the heroine of his poem with the highest ideal of womanhood of the earliest vedic days. The saintly woman would fain fulfil any wishes of this sapling of a devoted wife, but Sita is already grown wiser within moments of her contact with Anasuya and is too happy to need any wish of hers to be fulfilled by the wonder-working woman from the hoary past. The older lady blesses the younger one, while the past merges in the more beautiful present. Sita is clearly marked as the heroine of the poem and the poet happily sings of her life in the rarest melody that poetry is capable of.

The poet who had brought the sage Rama at the end of Bala-kandam to announce the full growth of his mighty hero, intro-

duces the woman sage Anasuya to mark the maturer personality of the heroine who was now to accompany her husband in the eventful forest life: Sita was here raised to the highest ideal of womanhood of all times.

### III

## VALUES AND THE CONCEPT OF CHARACTER IN VALMIKI

In declaring his *Ramayana* to be Veda-sammata or in accordance with the vedic traditions and sanctions, Valmiki evidently means that the culture, ideals, hopes and problems of the Ramayana age were part of a civilisation which arose and flourished under inspiration from the Vedas. The people of whom Valmiki wrote were proud of the vedic sanctions for all that they thought and cherished, for it was the Veda that had bequeathed to them all that they were happy to claim as the glory of their race. Their religion, culture, institutions and traditions, as well as their metaphysics, sciences and literature were all born of the vedic lores. The society that Valmiki was depicting had intimate links with that ancient way of Aryan life in which the Vedas had infused purposes and values, unique in that age, when outside that society barbaric passions, demoniacal vanities, monstrous self-assertions, self-aggrandisements and self-gratifications were nourished by force of clan-feelings, arms, brute physical and diplomatic strength and even spiritual cults pursued for the sake of mere self-glorification. For maintaining an unbroken interest in the emotional appeal of values, considered sacred in that vedic civilisation, Valmiki charged every aim and pursuit in domestic and public life in that Aryan society with an illumining halo of reminiscences of vedic texts. An instance of such vedic reminiscences is found in the recollection of an obscure vedic text in connection with Sita's marriage. The bow had been broken, and the marriage settled, when Janaka makes a remark which we are likely to overlook. "Today is Magha, and the marriage will be celebrated two days hence, on the Falguni day". In the Vedas, (R.V.X, 85, 13) Magha and Falguni are mentioned as Aghah and Arjunih in connection with a cosmic phenomenon symbolized as

the marriage of the Sun's daughter. In fact, the Moon in Falguni Nakshastra or the constellation ushers blessedness or the Bhaga on the full moon night preceding the March equinox in the Deva-yana, the northern path of the Sun.

Such vedic hymns were sung in every home in the mornings and evenings, and every social and religious ceremony was inaugurated with vedic mantras so familiar to men, women and children of all classes. The Vedas were understood and followed universally, and the vedic values were cherished by the Aryans and the nobler sections of the other races of the time. In the recollections of the vedic texts, the people followed the lines of thought in whatever natural history, cosmogony, metaphysics, spiritual philosophy or ethical tenets these hymns embodied. To them the truth about the Sun, the Earth, the Moon, the winds, the waters, the storms, and other natural phenomena lay well revealed through the vedic hymns. The vedic legends never failed to remind them of the ambitions, adventures and achievements of the mighty heroes and the seers of the past. For them, their own immediate predecessors were true representatives in names and deeds of those heroes who, in the vedic hymns, had been close comrades with gods like Indra, Varuna, the Ashvins, the Maruts and the Adityas. An overwhelming exuberance of references to the vedic sages and kings confirms Valmiki's claim about the *Ramayana* to be rich in legacies from the Vedas.

In doing justice to his poetic genius for co-relating within his theme, echoes of places, incidents and personalities in the vedic hymns, Valmiki undertook to narrate as great an event as any globe-rocking catastrophe like killing of Vritra by Indra, reflected in the vedic hymns. His concept of character of every shade of personality involved in one of the greatest events in the history of that race was to be worthy of association with his hero whose own personality was to tower over heroes of all times and races.

For any great poet, magnitude of evil and dimensions of character of a great hero's adversary are not far to seek out of the world around him. In the light of the vedic values, the adversary that Valmiki had against his hero was equally a notable figure for the contemporaries as well as the coming generations. To describe such an adversary, whose glorious achievements were marred by misdeeds and follies, and who was an object of horror by his demoniacal intents and capacities, was no small



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task for him. Yet the real task for Valmiki lay in developing the theme and the mighty characters on the side of his hero in a way that these would encompass the aspirations of the people who were deeply attached to the spirit of the vedic lores and legends. At the same time, the theme and the characters were to be worthy of the poetic genius that was to sing of this theme and these characters. The unique correspondence underlying the development of action in the main plot and the pattern of serious deliberations with a buoyant optimism on the part of the people involved in the action was maintained by the poet through suggestive allusions to the ideals, disciplines and other values of life that the Vedas had inspired in the people. Valmiki, who was to set models for the coming generations of poets, worked for establishing values that would make his theme worthy of epic dimensions.

No values could be weightier than the vedic values in relating the events in the life of the race with the living purposes in the ever-flowing stream of life itself. National and human ideals, educational and intellectual standards, and social, moral and spiritual urges on which the future poets were to build up their smaller or greater themes were to be sanctified as the values on which nature could permit humanity to secure its existence for ever on this Earth. By recounting experiences of gods and the elders of humanity, as reflected in the Vedas, Valmiki gave to humanity a treasure of priceless values which build up man's self-confidence, his faith in the ultimate victory of good over evil, and his hope in the Divine Agency ever working to make law and virtue prevail over lawlessness and vice. Thus Valmiki is reminding his contemporary readers, as sage Vishvamitra reminds Rama, that Divinity as Vishnu had more than once come to rescue the Devas and the law-proclaiming pioneers of civilisation, against forces of destruction, enemies of civilisation and against such freaks in nature as retard processes of life. In his legend of the churning of the ocean, Valmiki narrates Lord Shiva's compassion shown to all creatures by drinking off the poison that collected in the cosmic upheaval, which could have dried the springs of life everywhere. In the same upheaval, while the earth was settling in its orbit, Vishnu vanquished Asuras, and besides distributing Nectar, Amrita, Soma or Immortality among gods, himself sup-

ported the earth by assuming the form of a Tortoise which is the nearest living image of an ellipse of which form the elliptic or the path of the earth indeed is. For giving the unique value of Nishtha in which scientific knowledge and spiritual faith are well integrated, Valmiki was making popular knowledge of equinoxes revealed in the vedic legends. Thus he has made for us less commonly known vedic hymns significant with deep meanings. The legends may well be recalled in the vedic lines:

"Strong, Lords of Magic power, ye twain churned the united worlds apart,

Who ye, implored by Vimada, Nasatyas, forced apart the pair  
When the united pair were sent as under, all the gods complained.

The gods to the Nasatyas cried, bring these together once more",

(R. Veda X, 24, 4.5)

and, "I will declare the earliest deeds of Indra and  
acts which Maghavan hath accomplished

When he hath conquered godless viles and magic,  
Soma became his own entire possession",

(R.V. VII, 98.5)

and, "I will declare the mighty deeds of Vishnu of him who  
measured out the earthly regions.

Who propped the highest place of congregation,  
thrice setting down his footstep, widely striding".

(R.V. I, 154.1)

In the legend of Vishnu as Vamana or the Dwarf, vanquishing Bali, the gods had once more been saved from a threat to their supremacy over the world of man. The legend inspires the hero to take up the cause of human values; but more than that it confirms for Valmiki's contemporaries an experience of the elderly generations about the divine concern over the affairs of the noble ones ever willing to fight against forces of darkness and destruction. Through this legend, Valmiki bequeathed another priceless value 'Varchah', dignity or the will that combats evil and rehabilitates law on this earth. In this legend of Vishnu's birth as Kashyapa's son, Valmiki was once again shaping a living human episode out of a single vedic couplet attributed to sage Kashyapa, seeking comfort in hours of grief—

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"For Jatavedas, let us press the Soma;  
may he consume the wealth of the malignant,  
May Agni carry us through all our troubles  
through grief as in boat across the river".

(R.V. I. 99)

In giving this value to which religions have given the name of faith or hope, Valmiki does not sermonize, but recalls the value through vedic legends. Freedom is another great value adored by Valmiki. Rama frees his father from the bondage of a pledge. Freedom is bestowed on Sugriva and Vibhishana. Sages are freed from the fear of demons in the forests, where the sages carried on their holy plans to contribute to human knowledge. Even Sita's liberation from Ravana's captivity is developed as a holy war for liberating the beauty of life from the grip of monstrous selfishness. Vedic hymns were rich in the heroic deeds of gods bestowing freedom to heroes and sages.

"Wherewith, O heroes, ye vouchsafed deliverance to Sayu,  
Atri and to Manu long ago,  
Wherewith ye shot your shafts in Syumar-asmi's cause,  
come hither unto us, O Ashvins with those aids".

(R.V. I. 112.16)

and, "Ye twain are wondrous strong and skilled in arts  
that heal,  
both bringers of delight, ye both won Daksha's praise.  
Vishvaka calls on you as such to have his life.  
Break ye not up your friendship, come and set me free".

(R.V. VIII 75.1)

To add grace to the glory of human life, Valmiki extols justice and mercy as values to be cherished in every struggle of life. Divine grace shown to Ahalya has a vedic sanction, for Vishnu showed grace to Indra in absolving the chief of gods from sins.

"Then Indra said, about to slaughter Vritra, O my  
friend Vishnu, Stride full boldly forward, . . . .

In deeper distress, I cooked a dog's intestines;  
among the gods I found no one to comfort.

My consort I held in degradation.

The Falcon then brought me by the pleasant Soma".

R.V. IV 18.11 and 13)

Rich in these vedic values, Valmiki's theme remains human with a concept of character in which golden and silvery virtues of truth, honour, chastity, duty and self-restraint illumine every trying moment and impending doom in the lives of men and women. For the pattern and dimension of his epic characters, he drew much from the Vedas, the most sacred and traditional lore in the land. The vedic legends speak of glorious characters in singles, doubles, fours and multitudes. Valmiki's characters, too, contribute to his theme in singles, twos, fours and multitudes. Like gods in the Vedas, these characters are engaged in the fulfilment of a divine plan. Thus the Vedas alone could be the literary background for him in the concept of character.

It is difficult to fathom the working of a poet's mind engaged in composing a great poem. Still, however, if collaboration and clash of characters, relation of incidents, working up of a climax and other similar features in the structure of a plot are the creations of a poet's genius, his characters which are indeed the nucleus of his great plot, are inevitably drawn from society. It is for this reason that the readers' identification is more universal with characters than with events. As representatives of the ideas that a society has inherited from its past, and as the monuments of the ideals that it has laboured to maintain, these characters are the lighthouses that guide the poet, as well as his readers through trying moments of their reflective lives. For his characters, a poet is always grateful to society. His sympathies with characters are an expression of this gratefulness. Valmiki, too, was grateful to the age which had produced the great characters of *Ramayana*. His proud claim to the vedic sanction was an expression of his homage to the Vedas for their having moulded the ideals of the society of which the *Ramayana* is a poetic record.

Concept of character is, indeed, the most striking feature of the *Ramayana*. There is something strangely superb in the combination of virtue and power in its hero and his comrades. In this respect, the *Ramayana* undoubtedly stands apart from the epics of the World. It is through its characters, indeed, that the *Ramayana* breathes the spirit of the Vedas.

Valmiki was conscious of the fact that art in the days of its birth was to sing of man as the Vedas had sung of Divinity. As his poem was to be sung in honour of a hero whose deeds would dwarf all gods, features of Rama's personality as a character in



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single were drawn in close resemblance with Vishnu, the most graceful of the vedic gods. Vishnu had given the share of soma or immortality to Indra and to heaven and earth and had brought freedom and life to all. He was powerful like Varuna and kind like Mitra, and was higher than the highest gods. He redeemed Indra from sins incurred while killing the Asuras.

"These offerings increase his mighty manly strength, He brings both parents down to share the genial flow."

"We laud the manly power of him, the mighty one, preserver, Inoffensive, Bounteous and Benign". (Rigveda I. 155.3 & 4)

"He who brings gifts to him, the Ancient and the last, to Vishnu, who ordains together with his spouse."

"Vishnu hath power supreme and might that finds the day,  
And with Mitra unbars the stable of the kine".

"Who, Maker, throned in all the three Worlds,

helps the Aryan man,

and gives the worshipper his share of Holy law".

(Rigveda I. 156.4 & 5)

and

"None who is born or being born, god Vishnu! has reached the utmost limit of thy grandeur.

The vast high vault of heaven thou hast supported and fixed earth's eastern pinnacle securely".

(R.V. VII. 99.2)

Thus Valmiki draws his readers' attention to those less known vedic hymns where the 'churning' of the ocean had revealed cosmogony in terms of victory of the Devas over Asuras and Vishnu's gift of Soma or immortality to Devas, in lines like:

"Which fair unrobbed, the Falcon, brought thee in his foot the red-hued dwelling of the Juice.

Through this came vital power which lengthens out our days and kinship through its help awake".

(R.V. X. 144.5)

For this vedic idiom of immortality of gods, Valmiki also gives the legend of the birth of Kumara, the six-faced general of the gods, for their victory over Asuras. This is Lord Shiva's

energy embodied in the six-faced god like the Soma sparkling bright in the six expanses or the directions as in the lines:

“The sage has measured out the six expanses from which no single creature is excluded. (R.V. 47, 3)

This, even this, is he who hath created the breadth of earth, the lofty height for heaven”.

(R.V. VI. 47-4)

Irresistible might and unfailing generosity are the virtues extolled in the hymns to the Adityas out of whom ‘Indra, Mitra, Varuna and Aryamana are the brightest four’ in the world of gods. Theirs is the united role in the maintenance of a divine order in the three Worlds. With them, like Rama and Lakshmana are the twin gods Ashwins, the wonder-working guardians of the noble and law-abiding people. Above them in the highest heaven is the Mother Aditi, piety and grace infinite like Kaushalya, with her three benign counterparts Bharati, Ida, and Saraswati who bless mankind with life, intelligence and perpetuity. To the list, the Vedas add Rudras, the terrible upholders of justice amongst whom are the host of stormy Maruts that like Maruti and his monkey comrades in the Ramayana befriend man in his incessant struggles against monsters of evil. Valmiki found in them, dimensions of strength which were truly worthy of the characters of a great epic.

Grace in the all-embracing Rama, self-less devotion in the right-protecting Bharata, noble wrath in the wealth-winning Lakshmana, and fellowship in the foe-destroying Shatrughna, are indeed reminiscent of these features in the quadrangle of the vedic Adityas, the sons of Aditi. The sages among whom Rama moved looked upon Rama as a representative of Indra’s might and even his adversaries like Maricha remarked that Rama was as mighty as Indra and Varuna. Perfection of motherhood in Kaushalya was, in the same way, a vedic gift to the hero’s mother in the epic. The stormy host of Vanaras out of whom Hanuman was the son of Maruta, surely recalls the Maruts of the Vedas. The poet had only to link the conception of glorious personalities of gods in the Vedas with the greatness of mighty heroes amongst men, so that his epic could inspire as well as convince his readers. In the vedic age, gods were known as the Jatavedas, or born geniuses. All greatness was thus looked upon as a divine gift or

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a godly feature. The succeeding age had inherited the idea and looked upon all born geniuses as gods. Valmiki shared this faith of the people and made the features of his characters as godly.

This was in fitness with the great theme of the poem. Valmiki's hero was one of the vedic gods born again. Rama was, thus, an incarnation of Vishnu who had come to vanquish an enemy of the Aryan race. The hero and the task before him were to be painted in dimensions worthy of the hero's greatness. The poet explored the scale of godly dimensions out of the sacred Vedas. Killing of Tadaka at an early age, and breaking the great Bow were events great enough to make a hero of a man, but the liberation of Ahalya, who had suffered a curse for a weakness common to all flesh, was an action similar to a god's deeds. Ashvins had done such deeds in the age of gods, and the two brothers Rama and Lakshmana, whom the poet compared to Ashvins moving together, did not fail to remind the people of those gods whose deeds were recited daily through the vedic hymns.

"Wherewith Angirasas, ye triumphed in your heart and outward went to liberate the flood of milk,  
Wherewith ye helped the hero Manu with new strength—come hither unto us, O Ashvins with these aids."

"Wherewith ye brought a wife for Vimida to wed, wherewith ye freely gave the ruddy cows away,  
Wherewith ye carried home Sudevi to Sudas—come hither unto us, O Ashvins with those aids"

(R.V.I. 112, 18-19)

The four sons of Dasharatha were indeed bright like gods to conjure up pictures of those sons of Aditi to whom the seers had paid their first homage.

"Ye to whom Manu, by seven priests with kindled fire offered the first oblation with his heart and soul. Vouchsafe us, ye Adityas, shelter free from fear and make us good and easy paths to happiness".

(Rig Veda-X. 63, 7)

Dasharatha, too, was painted on the same godly scale; though soberer colours worthy of his old age were added to his portrait.

The poet had recalled the older event of Vishnu's birth in the earlier age, when Kashyapa and Aditi performed penance to have Vishnu as their son. The legend of Vishnu as the god of the three strides is well known in the Vedas. Howsoever obscure to us, the older event did not fail to suggest to the people of Valmiki's time that Dasharatha remained Kashyapa in the poet's mind, for he too got Rama as the fruit of a sacrifice. Dasharatha's grief, too, was reminiscent of the grief to which the vedic seer, Kashyapa, had given utterance in a single versed hymn (R.V.I. 99) quoted above.

Disciplined fatherhood of Janaka, too, was a reminiscence of the vedic grand-old-disciplined father. 'Daksha Prajapati' who had received Mitra and Varuna, the pair of mighty Adityas, just as Janaka or 'father' received Rama and Lakshmana, the two mighty benefactors of humanity. In the Vedas, Aditi had invited Mitra and Varuna to witness the life-long vow of Daksha.

"Aditi, to the birth of Daksha and the vow thou summonest, the kings, Mitra and Varuna".

(R.V. X-64/5)

And as Sita's marriage in the poet's mind had recalled Surya's marriage, every little detail assumed dimensions of an eternal rite. Janaka's praise for Rama and Lakshmana were only an echo of Daksha's praises for the pair of Ashvins, who had come to attend the marriage of Surya's daughter.

"The daughter of the Sun, your car ascended first reaching, as it were, the goal with courses.

All deities within their hearts assented and Ye Nasatyas are close linked with glory".

(R.V. I. 117.17)

With such regard for the vedic traditions, the poet would not have found it irrelevant to bring in the poem some vedic characters like the older rishis, Vasishtha, Agastya and Visvamitra. The poet was creating an atmosphere of the vedic age out of vedic lores. All great rishis of the past had inspired earlier heroes. Atri and Bharadvaja had helped Manu, Nahusha and Yayati in the days of the deluge. Rama was similarly taken to forests under the guidance of Vishvamitra to be taught the mysterious weapons which the forest-dwelling rishis had secretly invented and preserved for helping heroes of the race. Such events were true to



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the ideals of the vedic rishis. The poet was recalling the spirit of renunciation in the sages devoted to the cause of Aryan civilisation and working in their forest ashrams for the fulfilment of their object.

Whether the sages who guided Rama were the same old rishis at the end of their long lives, or they were descendants of the same rishis maintaining the high ideals of the Ashramas or the hermitages, makes little difference in the representation of the life-history of Rama in the *Ramayana*. The poet probably felt no need to offer an apology for making Vasishtha a shadowy personality or Vishvamitra a dream relic of the past, or Agastya a personality transformed to a god through fire-cults. He was content to describe the great past as it was related to the lives of these great seers.

The poet is silent about the political struggles of the *Ramayana* age. He makes no mention of diplomacies or relations between different states and different races while great inter-racial war was going on in the centre of non-Aryan states. The drama of supremacy of the Aryan race is described in the form of adventures of a banished prince. It is only too evident that even when the whole nation-wide preparations might have been going on for this supremacy, Valmiki was conforming to the poetic unity of his narration by maintaining the buoyant optimism of the Vedas. He confined himself to poetic idiom for all such details, and concentrated only on the symbol of sacrifice which since the days of the Vedas had denoted all enterprise directed to the good of the human race. The bows and swords which the rishis like Agastya and Sutikshna presented to Rama are symbols of the preparation which the earlier generations had made to help Rama in vanquishing a formidable enemy of the Aryan civilisation.

When the poet described Rama moving among the rishis who were laying out great sacrifices, he told much in his vedic idiom about racial consciousness in the South. Vishvamitra's great sacrifice was as much a symbol of a similar objective of the whole race as it was an event in the personal life of the seer.

Still however it remains an interesting fact that the hymns in the Rig Veda are associated by the commentators with the life events of the seers given in the *Ramayana* and its successor the *Mahabharata*. There is no popular source earlier than the *Rama-*

*yana* to give the priestly feud between Vishvamitra and Vasishtha, the seers so well known to the vedic scholars.

The epic would have been merely an epilogue to the Vedas, if the hero, too, had been a well-known figure. The poet's pioneering genius was not satisfied till a warrior who had risen mightier than his ancestors, was found as the hero for his poem. Hidden in the past lay so many branches of Manu's family which had produced warriors of great fame. The poet was happy to select a hero out of one such family which had a share in the spread of Aryan civilisation. The poet laid traditions for great artists, who, everywhere till recently, selected only the high-born for their heroes. Valmiki's hero was not an upstart, who had risen to a great status by sheer might. He had traditions of greatness in his blood, and was one who maintained ideals that earlier sons of Manu had cherished. Rama's family had in the past an Ikshvaku, a Kukshi, a Yuvanashva, a Mandhata, a Sagara, a Bhagiratha, a Raghu, a Kalmashapada, a Nahusha, a Yayati, a Dilipa, and a Dasharatha. Most of these names were associated with great events in the life of the Aryan race, and the Vedas had mentioned these as the companions of gods.

The poet does not appear to be much concerned with the historical data connected with these names. He was content that there were copious associations of the vedic names with his hero's family. Some of Rama's ancestors like Nahusha and Yayati can only be very vaguely connected with the princes of similar names in the Rig Veda. In the Rig Veda, Nahusha and his son Yayati are earlier associated as descendants of Manu, while Nahusha of *Ramayana*, is Ambarisha's son and is only a fourth ancestor of Dasharatha. Only in the world of poetic imagination could it be valid to connect Ikshvaku of the *Ramayana* to an Ikshvaku mentioned only once in Rig Veda as a prince. The vedic text as usual mentions universal names to inspire man.

"Him, in whose service flourished Ikshvaku rich and dazzling bright,

As the Five Tribes that are in heaven". (R.V. X-60.4)

Yuvanashva and his son Mandhata are very likely the vedic figures in the same sense. Mandhata's protecting deity, Agni, is invoked in the Rig Veda as Sapta-manushah or protector of the seventh descendant of Manu, and in the *Ramayana* too Yuva-

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nashva is only the eighth descendant of Ikshvaku. All this is to revive vedic associations.

"Agni who liveth in all streams, Lord of the Sevenfold Races of men,

Him dweller in three homes we seek best slayer of Dasyus for Mandhata, first in sacrifice. Let all the others die away".

(R. V. VIII, 39, 8.)

The same Mandhata had gone far away fighting against enemies where the swift moving Ashvins helped him in his conquests.

"Wherewith ye compass round the sun, when far away strengthened Mandhata in his tasks as Lord of Lands and

to Sage Bharadvaja gave protecting help—come hither unto us, O Ashvins, with these aids." — (R.V. 1, 112, 15).

The same Mandhata, 'Yauvanashva or the son of Yuvanashva' is the seer of a hymn in the Rig Veda. He is a warrior who swears to follow righteousness in all his conduct.

'Relax that mortal's stubborn strength whose heart is bent on wickedness.

Trample him down, beneath thy feet, who watches for and aims at us. The goddess mother brought thee forth, the blessed mother gave thee life.'

and

"Never, O God, do we offend nor are we ever obstinate, we walk as holy texts command.

Closely we clasp and cling to you, cling to your sides, beneath your arms". (R.V. X-134.2 & 7).

Kalmashapada is again a well-known vedic figure who was a protege of Vishvamitra, and as a Rakshasa devoured the hundred sons of Vasishtha. The last hymn in the seventh book of the Rig Veda, according to Sayana, reflects that legend where Rishi Vasishtha curses evil spirits. The *Mahabharata* narrates the same legend at length.

In spite of the fact that these names can be located in the Vedas, it is difficult to trace the full genealogy of Rama's family anywhere outside the *Ramayana*. The poet was seeking a vedic accord with the history of the hero's family by giving these vedic

names in the story. The *Mahabharata* and other Puranas however repeatedly assert the truth of the genealogy in the Ramayana story.

Yet it is nothing very peculiar to the *Ramayana* that the names therein cannot be conveniently located in the vedic texts. The Vedas do not yield definite clues to any names in the post-vedic literature. Writers on the Vedas declared that Vedas belong to an antiquity beyond all historical relations. The vedic names according to this tradition, stand for universals and not particulars. The Mimamsakas, as the most popular of the vedic schools, upheld this view. Jaimini's *Purva Mimamsa* and Swami Dayanand's *Rig-Veda-Bhashya Bhumika* follow this tradition.

Thus the vedic names like Manu and Ikshvaku must have been names adopted by or awarded as titles to great pre-historic personalities as marks of recognition of their dedication to great ideals. The pedigree as given in the *Ramayana* may have suffered changes through the process of being recited at various courts in different ages. In their efforts to connect the oldest pre-historic names, like Manu, Yayati, Nahusha with similar names occurring in the Vedas, the court bards have made the pedigrees vague. Thus in the *Bhagavata Purana* (9.6) Vikukshi was Ikshvaku's son, and Kakutstha, also known as Purunjaya, was the son of Vikukshi. This eliminates many names given in the list. In many puranas Kakutstha is mentioned as one who rode on a humped bull — 'Kakut', and took a prominent part in the wars between the Devas and the Asuras at the close of Sat-yuga. The vedic word Kakutstha however also means 'One who is established in the vedic knowledge or the vedic speech.'

Two verses in the first book of the Rig Veda, however, need a little attention in connection with Dasharatha, literally "Lord of Ten Chariots", and the sixty thousand days associated with him:

"Horses of dusky colour stood beside me, ten chariots, Svanaya's gift with mares to draw them.

Kine numbering sixty thousand followed  
after, Kakshivan gained them, when the days were closing,  
and

Forty Bay horses of the ten-car's master before  
a thousand lead, the long procession.



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Riding in joy Kakshivan's sons and Pajra's have groomed  
the coursers decked with pearly trippings".

(R.V. I-126, 3 and 4)

Aryan settlements in Koshala in those early vedic days are confirmed by the Puranas. Even if the *Ramayana* does not speak much of the youthful exploits of Dasharatha, it speaks reverently of the old sovereign of Koshala. This veteran warrior must have had a glorious career in his youth to win so much of admiration from all his friends and ministers. Rama was proud of Dasharatha's name, and had accepted the long exile only to maintain his father's well-established honour. The figure of sixty thousand years with a strange shade of meaning was a gift of immortality bestowed on the king by the poet.

Rama is also a vedic name mentioned in the Tenth book of the Rig Veda, where Rama is one of the wealthy princes renowned for their generosity and leadership. The seer of the hymn prays to gods Savitar and Indra to guide his people so that they may be ranked amongst the most powerful and generous princes who were fortunate to be guided by these gods.

"O God Savita, harmed by none, lauded give us a place among  
wealthy princes.

With his car steeds at once hath our Indra guided the reins  
and cars of these men. (R.V. X-93.9)

Thus to Duhsima, Prithavana, have I sung, to Vena, Rama to  
the nobles, and the King.

They yoked five hundred, and their love of us and famed  
upon their way." (R.V.X-93, 14).

The Veda celebrates Rama as one of the five generous princes. The hero of the *Ramayana* is undoubtedly a generous prince who renounced his kingdom, and gave all his wealth as gifts to the rishis, for the sake of truth, and was mercifully disposed towards all those who sought shelter under him. The Horse-sacrifice and large-scale charity were the most prominent features of Rama's life after his return from the exile. Another prince, Vena, mentioned in the hymn and also mentioned in *Manu Smriti* is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* in the same list of celebrated kings in which Dasharatha's son, Rama, is mentioned. Sagara and Kakutstha, two of Rama's ancestors, also occur in the same list

in close association with Vena who, as all these references indicate, is a prominent vedic name. Ikshvaku is also associated with some five people, and is undoubtedly the most prominent name connected with Koshala. Many royal families in ancient India claimed their descent from this glorious son of Manu.

The vedic sanction sought by the poet in all these different ways is a proof of the truth of the Ramayana story; for the poet was writing in an age in which there was no greater confirmation of a fact than its association with the Veda. It was also an index of the age that the *Ramayana* was perfected to a limit where it begins to appear a creation of imagination. 'Truth is stranger than fiction' is true more of the *Ramayana* than of any other great poem. What George Bernard Shaw remarked at the time of Gandhi's murder is applicable to the *Ramayana* also, for 'it only proves how dangerous it is to be too good'. Ideals that the characters have maintained are a little too high for the modern age.

Moreover, our notion of greatness has so much settled down to suffering personalities that a mighty arm endowed with intellect and character—however a coveted ideal of all chivalric ages—is hardly believed to be a historical possibility. We can believe in the existence of noblest of martyrs, but we can only wonder if there could be a hero who escaped martyrdom and was able to make a glorious career out of adversity.

It is to Valmiki's credit that he never aimed at preaching the worship of his hero, although devotion and idolatry about Rama had been current in the people of his time, or has since been in the people till today. The poet did not idealise his characters to the extent of overlooking their shortcomings and weaknesses. If we fail to notice this feature of Valmiki's work, the fault is ours; if we notice these weaknesses a little too cynically, the poet is again not to be blamed for this. Rama was a real personality for the poet, and, as such, Rama's career and conduct did not altogether conform to any theoretical concepts of a perfect Man. Rama's life was subject to emergencies and expediencies. His measures should not have been worthy of a great leader and organiser of stranger races, had all his actions been obstinately simple and lacking in statesmanship. In Valmiki's opinion, success in life was dependent on lessons drawn from experiences of ages, and whatever had been sanctioned by the vedic seers in the form of actions of gods, was beneficent to society and helpful to

Dharma. In the interest of higher values of life, expedencies were resorted to by Indra, who had established godly order on this earth. The Vedas spoke of such an expedient measure of Indra engaged in a battle wherein he felt like a sinner and would have given up the combat, but for Vishnu's support and sanction. A warrior could deal with an enemy in an emergent manner before the enemy would grow too strong to be dealt with at all. Bali could be a friend of Rama, but the whole monkey-race had sympathies with Sugriva and if the usurper of a brother's wife could be vanquished, Rama would be regarded as the supporter of the good and weak. Here was an opportunity for Rama to do the right as well as the needful. An open duel with Bali might have proved bloody, and the monkey-race including Sugriva might have been moved to the side of Bali engaged in the battle with one who was only an outsider. Before such compassion for Bali arose in any quarter, taking away all chances from the lonely hero to establish his might as well as righteousness, a prompt decision was made and an instantaneous action was taken by Rama. Put into language of poetry this situation would form a chapter by itself, and might prove a digression for any lesser poet. Valmiki transformed the whole episode into narration of an arbitrary action taken by Rama in the manner possible under those conditions. Was not Rama a prince in the line of Manu, the law-maker? The exile took away his kingdom but could not root out the kingship from him. Kingship in the exiled prince rose to the occasion for punishing, without ceremony, the violators of fraternal relations. A similar prompt decision in the case of Shurpanakha was the result of a prompt judgement on the part of a king. The laws of the land in those days probably dictated such a punishment for a woman who tempted and would rather force a man to adultery in the presence of his wife. Such an action was not only expected of a law-abiding prince, but was rather demanded of him by the holy texts. Had not Mandhata prayed to gods for a determination to follow the holy laws, and had not, as Vishvamitra narrated to Rama before Rama's encounter with Tadaka, Vishnu dealt strongly with a woman-monster in the past?

These instances of expedient behaviour, or what we sometimes call blemishes in the life of the hero, had as much of the vedic sanction as his strictly lawful conduct like obedience to his father.

The heroine, similarly, was not a mere idealisation, though there were some vedic associations in the poet's mind about the incident of her birth. The poet was describing a real woman in the episode of the golden deed. Her capricious charges of ill intentions against Lakshmana, while the latter was rightly unwilling to leave her alone in the forest, were unbecoming of a lady who was bred up in the cultured family of Janaka. But the poet did not overlook the gaps which were left in her growth to womanhood under too fond parents. She was yet too young and had always felt too complacent under a warrior's protection to be competent to calculate dangers of a lonely forest sojourn.

The poet knew it would be a disappointing discovery about her for the readers, but he felt his heroine was not losing her greatness for a fitful utterance in an intense moment of anxiety for her husband. Divinity had bestowed greatness on her in the incident of her birth, when the furrow-line bore her up as a reward for the Sacrifice in which Janaka and his wife were engaged as royal peasants. As requested by the people during a long drought, the king and the queen were to plough the field, reciting vedic hymns to propitiate god Indra for showering rain on the parched land. The poet and the people of his age were convinced of the promise of great womanhood in Sita as she reminded them, of agricultural goddess, Sita, whom the Vedas had adored in conception with an agrarian mystic charm.

"Auspicious Sita, come thou near, we venerate and worship thee. That thou mayst bless and prosper us and bring us fruits abundantly." (Rig Veda IV, 57-6)

The poet was happy to find here the ground for a myth about her, and gave her the title of 'Ayonija', leaving for his readers to guess, whether she was an immortal being, discovered and not born, or she was a peasant girl. She was born to her mother, while the parents had accepted the order of life as peasants, and was adopted as the daughter as soon as they re-entered the royal Kshatriya order.

The Vedas in the days of Valmiki are clearly not a dim tradition, merely preserved in the sacred texts. The vedic ideas had their legitimate sway over the people, and were an effective means of transporting people's thought to Divinity. In seeking the vedic sanction for his epic, Valmiki was recording this inner



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faith of the people. The poets and scholars after him paid homage to him for his having sanctioned his poem in that manner and the people of India in all ages have regarded recitation of the *Ramayana* auspicious for the same reason.

The tradition set by Valmiki to find vedic sanction for all writing has been maintained by Indian poets. No popular poet could indeed afford to go against the spirit of the Vedas. Vyasa had the same motif in the composition of the *Mahabharata*. The philosophical schools, too, claimed that their thought had the vedic sanction behind them, and all of them quoted vedic texts in support of their theses. Vedic scholars like Swami Dayanand also, in a way, revived Valmiki's concept of the vedic sanction, and interpreted godly features, virtues and qualities of Mitra, Varuna, Ashvins, Indra and Vishnu as representations of the best men of all ages. Still, the *Ramayana* stands above all other works as the greatest classic of the Indian people. By revealing the grace and beauty of poetry in the Vedas, and by linking its ideals with the vedic civilisation, poetry in the *Ramayana* grows as truly impersonal as great poetry could ever be.

## Chapter V

## THE ARANYA KANDAM

## I

## A SUMMARY

Events of the Aranya Kandam, the third book of the *Ramayana*, are spread over a number of years of Rama's life in the forest. The Rishis on the outskirts of the Dandaka forest hailed Rama as their saviour. As he advanced in the forests, Rama encountered Viradha, an ogre, who proved a die-hard, and gave a good deal of shaking to Rama's self-confidence. The giant was finally buried in a pit. Rama moved onward to Sharabhanga's Ashrama. When Rama approached the hermitage, god Indra with an army of celestial soldiers was descending from heaven to announce to the sage that a welcome awaited him in the World of gods. Indra also announced that Rama's life in the forest would be an event in the history of mankind, and Rama's victories over the Rakshasas would make the Dandaka forest safe for the Rishis.

The sage's life had a divine mission which the sage had realised in the moment of his contact with Rama. He had no attraction for the world of gods. He offered to transfer the merits of his penances to Rama. Rama humbly refused to accept gifts for which he had not worked. He had determined to emulate the sage's life through actions. The sage was pleased and advised Rama to go to the sage Sutikshma who would be ready to help Rama in fulfilling his mission. Entering the raised pyre, Sharabhanga burnt himself alive. To the surprise and reverential admiration of all, a celestial form rose out of the sage's ashes. The ascetics in that hermitage told Rama that the Rakshasas had been killing the innocent hermits in these regions. They appealed to Rama to clear the forests of the cannibals who had grown strong

and merciless. Rama was led to Sutikshna's hermitage. Sutikshna's penance had been great and his hermitage had been a shelter for thousands of ascetics. The sage had postponed his departure to Heaven only for having the privilege of Rama's visit. He had heard of Rama's exile and had anticipated Rama's movements towards this side of the forest. Indra had once visited the hermitage and Mahadeva also had been there. The sage's life and hermitage were predestined to play a role in Rama's life. Rama was happy to meet Sutikshna, but he was not willing to stay so close to the hermitage lest he should be tempted to hunt beasts in the sacred spot. With Sutikshna's permission, Rama went round to see other hermitages. The two brothers armed with bows, arrows and swords, moved through forests watching fauna and flora of the wilderness.

Sita who had been quietly watching Rama's meetings with the sages, had not failed to notice Rama's serious concern against the growing menace of the Rakshasas. As a solicitous wife, she carefully attempted to probe into the anxious state of Rama's mind. Falsehood, adultery and uncalled-for violence were the three ways through which a man could have a fall. She believed Rama to be free from falsehood and adultery. Her fear was that Rama was contemplating an uncalled-for violence against the Rakshasas. Rama's strong resolve to root out the Rakshasas was her great concern. She narrated how sage Satyavana whose life had been devoted to knowledge, followed a darker course of life, only because a friend left some weapon with him. Constant company with dreadful arms had sent the sage to hell. Sita's humble advice to Rama was to follow Dharma which taught non-violence and which enjoined pursuit of a quieter life of asceticism. That would make Rama a worthier son of his mother. Rama praised Sita for her solicitude for him and declared that, as a loving wife, Sita was a source of happiness to him. The ascetics who, but for their vow of non-violence, were powerful enough to deal with the Rakshasas could not be ignored. Rama had declared protection to them, and nothing could deter him from his resolve. Rama would have avowed to wipe out the Rakshasas, even if the sages had not approached him. Atrocities committed by the Rakshasas were a challenge to any man who loved virtue. Rama would gladly forsake his life, his wife, and his brother Lakshmana, but he would not go back from his pledge given to the Brahmanas.

Rama's wanderings in these forests brought him a wealth of experience. Study of wild life and contact with wise ascetics gave a freshness to his outlook on life. In one of the hermitages, Rama found a lake which was resounding with echoes of music. This was sage Mandakarni's pond where the invisible revelry of celestial nymphs for the pleasure of the invisible sage, was adding a strange melody to the surroundings. Rama spent ten years of his exile in the vicinity of this lake enjoying the hospitality of every good sage for a few months. Once again the party returned to Sutikshna's hermitage, where Rama requested the sage to guide him to the hermitage of the celebrated sage Agastya. As directed, the party visited the hermitage of Agastya's brother on the way and learnt how Muni Agastya had made that forest safe for all those who came there. Vatapi and Ilvala had been a great terror in those regions, but Agastya had brought a great relief to the ascetics by killing the monsters.

Coming near to the hermitage of Agastya, Rama told Lakshmana and Sita how the great sage's sojourn in the South had unnerved the Rakshasas. The sage commanded a great influence in the land beyond the Vindhya. All those who were devoted to higher ideals of life could safely settle in Agastya's Ashrama. Sages belonging to different races had settled under his protection, and devas, men and Gandharvas looked upon the sage as a great personality. Deccan had ceased to be the adventurer's grave, and the Rakshasas were afraid to enter the forests surrounding Agastya's Ashrama. Forests had been felled and land levelled around the hermitage, and peace reigned in the surroundings of the Ashrama.

Lakshmana informed the guard at the Ashrama about Rama's arrival. The sage sent a prompt welcome to Rama declaring that Rama's visit was long expected. Rama was allowed to enter the sacrificial chamber, where the sage and Rama had some confidential talks. Thereafter, the sage whose face was bright like a flame, offered welcome to all and gave Rama a celestial Bow, which, he declared, would help Rama to regain the lost prestige of the Aryan race against the Asuras. The sage admired Sita's sacrifice and love for Rama and advised Rama to take care of Sita, who was as virtuous as Arundhati. The sage knew all about Rama and his movements in the forests. Rama should now have a comfortable life near the Ashrama as Rama wished to enjoy



seclusion. A spot, known as Panchavati, was pointed out by the sage for him.

Near Panchavati Rama met Jatayu, the Vulture, who declared himself to be an old friend of Dasharatha. Jatayu gave a long list of Prajapatis or progenitors of all races since the first day of life on earth. Jatayu was himself a son of Aruna or the Sun's charioteer, with Sampati as his brother. Jatayu offered to look after Sita, when Rama would be away.

A thatched cottage was constructed at Panchavati. Lakshmana's promptness in the work of construction was a matter of pride for Rama. They settled at Panchavati, watching flowers and trees in the surroundings. Rama was happy to see all these varieties of vegetables and plants. Lakshmana described the beauty of hemanta or winter, the season in which rivers were covered with mists. The mountains were capped with snow. This was the season when the sun entered the southern part of the sky and the cold made every bird, beast and man shirk water. Ambitious warriors in this season went for conquests. While Rama was having an early morning bath in the Godavari, Lakshmana recalled how Bharata, too, would be carrying on a hard life of penance, sleeping on the floor and bathing early in the Sarayu as a mark of devotion for Rama.

Shurpanakha, sister of Ravana, saw Rama in the company of Sita and Lakshmana. She offered herself to be Rama's wife. Being refused by both the brothers, she was about to strike Sita, when Lakshmana chopped off her nose and ears. Crying, she ran to her brother, Khara, a monster of the locality. Then ensued the battle in which Rama was able to destroy fourteen warriors, the three chief monsters, Trishira, Khara, and Dushana, and their fourteen thousand followers. Rama's presence of mind and his skill in the use of powerful arms struck gods and sages with wonder. Akampana, a survivor monster, came to Lanka and narrated to Ravana how Rama had killed Khara and his followers. Boastful Ravana was ready to challenge gods, but on hearing that Rama was a matchless warrior, accepted Akampana's suggestion that Rama should not be challenged to an open battle. Ravana was convinced that if Sita were kidnapped, Rama would languish in the forests. Coming to Dandaka forest, Ravana called upon Maricha for assistance in his plan. Maricha appealed to Ravana to desist from his evil resolve and not to incur

Rama's anger. Ravana returned to Lanka. When Shurpanakha came to see Ravana, he was sitting on his throne with his mouth wide open, looking frightful like the god of death. His body was covered with marks of wounds which he had received in countless battles against gods and others. He was invincible. He could agitate the ocean, perform great deeds, and could knock down hill-tops. He had demolished all religious institutions, and was always ready to disturb religious rites. He had often upset the nearly fulfilled plans of the saints. He had abducted Takshaka's wife from Bhogavati. By virtue of his previous penances, he had ensured long life for himself. He had been cruel to all, and had earned the title of Ravana or 'one who made others weep'. Shurpanakha addressed her words to him in fury. She said: "It is unfortunate that you have neglected your territory and your people. You have so given yourself to indulgences fit for the uncivilised. You are greedy, indolent, and a slave of your passions. You are avoided by the people as cremation fire is avoided by men, or as mud is avoided by the elephants. You are rude, niggardly, haughty, and therefore have lost the support of your people. You are boastful, and indulge in self-praise. You are only childish and unwise, and know little of what is worth knowing. You have no control over your spies, finance and administration of justice in the state. You are no better than the subjects under you. Your follies are supported by your ministers who render you no proper advice. You are not in touch with the latest developments in the Janasthana, where fourteen thousand of your valiant soldiers have been killed so easily by Rama alone. You are certainly like a worn-out garment or a garland and, even though powerful, you are likely to lose your kingdom".

"Rama, on the other hand," Shurpanakha told Ravana, "was mighty-armed. Dressed in deer skin, the large-eyed Rama looked handsome like Cupid. When Rama stretched his mighty bow, beautiful like the rainbow, and discharged his gold-tipped arrows that hissed like snakes in the battles, none could mark his movements, while he was engaged in picking the arrows or loading and discharging his bow. The lines of soldiers received his incessant shower of arrows as crops received hail stones through clouds. Rama was alone capable of killing the host of Rakshasas within a few minutes. His brother, Lakshmana, was equally handsome, ferocious, and invincible and loved Rama like his

own self. Rama's wife, Sita, was large-eyed and beautiful like the full-moon. She was devoted to her husband and was well-known for her virtues. Her face glowed like burning gold, and her nails glistened with red ends. She was an unmatched beauty in the world of men, gods, Yakshas and Gandharvas. She was noble and her parts were well-formed".

Ravana once more approached Maricha for help in abducting Sita. Maricha warned Ravana against incurring Rama's anger. He said to Ravana, "You can make no estimate of Rama's virtues and might, for these are verily like Indra's and Varuna's. Your intention to challenge Rama tantamounts to inviting destruction for the Rakshasa race. Your unbridled passion will bring only disaster on Lanka and yourself. Sita is probably born as Nemesis for your evil deeds. Rama is neither frivolous nor greedy. He is not a slur on the Kashatriya race. Rama is a boon to his mother. He is not without merits. He is neither furious nor ill-intentioned. Though a great fighter, Rama is a saintly and truthful person. Armed with bow and arrows, Rama is like fire which none may afford to agitate without being burnt. My impressions of Rama's personality are confirmed through a personal experience. Even as a young urchin, Rama had struck me with a force greater than gods'. If you want me to be a victim of Rama's arrows, it will be certain death for me. In my opinion, you had better avoid any conflict with Rama".

Ravana, however, persisted and Maricha reluctantly agreed to do as commanded, warning Ravana, however, that it all boded an extinction of the Rakshasas. Maricha, who possessed magic powers transformed himself into a golden deer with silver spots, and frisked about where Sita was plucking flowers. As anticipated, Sita was tempted to have the deer, and even while Lakshmana cautioned Rama that the deer might be the monster Maricha who had often played serious tricks upon the hunters Sita insisted on having the deer, dead or alive. Rama ran after the deer, instructing Lakshmana not to leave Sita alone under any circumstances. Maricha took Rama far away, and when, at last, Rama discharged an arrow at him, the monster loudly called on Lakshmana and Sita in Rama's tone. Fearing that Rama's life was in danger, Sita implored Lakshmana to go and help Rama. Lakshmana told her that Rama needed no help and that it was not safe to leave her unguarded. Sita was furious and amidst tears charged



Lakshmana of evil intentions against her. All this pained Lakshmana, who left her with a warning that all this meant no good for her.

Dressed as a hermit, Ravana called on Sita and enlisted an entertainment from her. While she innocently narrated her life to him, he disclosed his identity and tried to persuade her to elope with him to Lanka. Failing to win her, he forcibly seized her and mounted his flying car. On his flight over Jatayu's nest, Ravana was challenged by Jatayu, who engaged him in a bloody combat for sometime. Giving a fatal wound to the faithful vulture, Ravana escaped to Lanka, while Sita called on forest deities to help her. In Lanka, Sita was kept in a well-guarded garden with hundreds of attendants to look after her.

Rama, on his return, had a presentiment of some calamity. Maricha's cries had made him suspect a conspiracy in the jungle. When he saw Lakshmana coming to him, he grew all the more anxious about Sita and hastened to the cottage. The hermitage was found deserted. Rama was mad with anger. He would ransack the forest and spare none. Lakshmana advised him not to be so confused, for the situation demanded self-possession. The two brothers went searching for Sita and came across Jatayu. Suspecting that Jatayu might have devoured Sita, Rama touched the crouched vulture with his sword and found that the poor bird had sacrificed his life in his efforts to rescue Sita. Jatayu breathed his last and was cremated by Rama.

Rama and Lakshmana wandered southward making inquiries about Sita. Near a cave, a hag of a monster came to Lakshmana and invited him to marry her. She was dealt in the same manner in which Shurpanakha had been dealt with. Farther in the forest, the two brothers were seized by the formidable Kabandha, a headless monster with eyes in his stomach. Being overpowered, the monster declared that he was a monster under Kubera's curse. A bright spirit arose out of the monster's ashes when he was cremated in compliance with his request. The spirit advised Rama to contact Sugriva at the Rishyamuka hill, calling upon Shabari on the way. Shabari was an old lady who, through services of the highly enlightened sages, had cultivated a spiritual way of life.

Shabari had been expecting Rama's visit towards this hermitage. She was happy to entertain Rama with wild fruits and herbs.



After communicating to Rama the blessings of the sages who had departed to heaven, she breathed her last peacefully like one who had realised the aim of her life. Rama felt new hope, when he took a bath in the pond near the sacred hermitage. Admiring the beauty of flowers and trees of the forest, the brothers crossed the Dandaka forest.

## II

### LIFE IN THE WILDERNESS

Aranya Kandam, the third book of the *Ramayana*, marks a wide range of the poet's genius in selecting events from the hero's life in the forest. Before we are able to notice any widening of the horizon in the hero's outlook on life, the poet unfolds a rare vision of the life of the Aryan race in those early days, when civilisation had yet to combat with barbarism. In Ayodhya Kandam was recorded the history of an age when the Aryans had long settled comfortably in the northern plains and had felt themselves secure within the fortified cities and well-defended country-side. Kings like Dasharatha had achieved much and had started looking at their states as valuable possessions, which Ikshvaku had inherited from Manu. They consolidated enough of the territory in northern plains and were content to maintain their prestige more by celebrations of the occasions of gods' victories over Asuras than by having any real expedition in the areas still under the sway of the barbaric people. The formalities of rituals were beginning to get a little more attention than the spirit which these rituals had embodied. The stern view of life and heroic virtue which the vedic seers had inspired in earlier generations were sinking under the weight of a prouder claim to traditions and civilisation. Such were Rama's thoughts as spoken to Lakshmana while crossing the river Gomati.

A gulf was created between those who were not content to rest till the whole land was made safe for the human race and those who had left the struggle as unavailing against the giant barbarians. Ayodhya Kandam had brought together Dasharatha and Vishvamitra, the former slyly withdrawing from adventure and the latter still a vigorous personality championing the cause of humanity against the cannibal inhabitants of the dense forests.

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Majority of the princes, however, were quite forgetful of the fate of the people of the bordering areas and were seldom ready to accept challenges of the more notorious of the tribal leaders who made their atrocities a cause of fear rather than anxiety for even the greatest of Aryan rulers.

In the Aranya Kandam, we meet a sturdier stock, most of whom were the Brahmanas, as Rama was told on his entrance in the Dandaka forest. These noble souls had not ceased in their efforts to stem the tide of growing barbarism. These selfless champions of Virtue, Vana-Prasthas as Valmiki has called them, had chosen to settle on the outskirts of the forests which were strongholds of degenerate monsters. The Vana-Prasthas crowding round Sutikshna and Agastya were safe; but every day some astray ascetics were seized by these giants. Heaps of bones scattered round these powerful hermitages or ashramas convinced Rama that the number of victims had been ever on the increase. The most cunning of the monsters had settled as friendly neighbours of the sages only to satisfy their cannibal instincts by tempting the innocent sages to accept gifts of meals. Vatapi and Ilvala were such twin-monsters, who, inviting the sages for meals, treacherously killed them. Ilvala served the Brahmanas with dishes of Vatapi's meat. This Vatapi possessed the magic power to burst out of the stomach, when called by Ilvala. The Brahmanas who partook the meals were thus fatal victims of a magic trick. Similar magic tricks were used by other monsters who roamed about in the forms of the deers and finding suitable opportunities devoured the ascetics. Maricha had often killed Rishis in the Dandaka forest in that manner and, as he told Ravana, had given up the villainous activities for fear of Rama's arrows.

Such were the tales of woe of the Brahmana ascetics who approached Rama with requests for protection. Many of these rishis were of the highest vedic order. Valmiki gives the list of titles which these seers had earned through penances. The Vaikhanas and the Valkhilyas, who looked unassuming like idiots, were great intellectuals and had cultivated great spiritual powers through special vedic hymns associated with their names. These were the well-washed, the drinkers of the light rays, those who broke pebbles, those who had leaves for their daily meals, those whose teeth served as the manger, those who bathed all the time,

those whose limbs were the only bed for sleep, those who never lay down, those who had no leisure, thinkers who lived on water or air, and those who had made their nests above the earth and those who slept on high projections only. As the names indicate, these were thinkers who were busy seekers of knowledge in the various fields and who had trained themselves to live on minimum necessities of life. It is no wonder if some of them were so absorbed in their study of light, air, water, leaves and stones that they were named after the objects of their study, as the author of the *Vaisheshika*-thought was known as Kanada or eater of atoms, for being absorbed in the study of atoms. Nevertheless, these recluses were putting untiring work in the field of their study and the author of the *Ramayana* has done justice to the Muse of poetry by incorporating these facts about their lives in his theme. None of the Indian poets has preserved this picture of the earliest days. Even Vyasa's narration of Agastya's victory over Vatapi and Ilvala has added details. In the *Mahabharatan* version, Agastya went to Ilvala seeking financial aid for himself and for four of his friendly kings. On discovering that he and these friends had been served with Vatapi's flesh, he exercised his spiritual power to digest Vatapi beyond recovery. Agastya also destroyed Ilvala who, after giving the party the promised gifts, was about to imprison and destroy them all. In the *Ramayana* the story of Vatapi and Ilvala is given in a cruder form. Agastya was once one of the invitees at Ilvala's place and was served with Vatapi's flesh. The sage was able to digest Vatapi beyond recovery. Valmiki in these descriptions of the ascetics has preserved the state of society which was contributing to the civilisation known as the *vedic*. If any people lived earnestly in those earliest days, these were the rishis who were innocent like new-born babes, so Rama was told, and yet were sternly earnest to wrest whatever secrets nature could yield to them. Believing that reactions stood in the way of pure thought they renounced not only arms and anger, but were vigorously avoiding all contacts with joys and sorrows of life. Sita had appreciated their renunciation of arms, and had pleaded to Rama that armament was a hindrance in the way of evolution of humanity. She narrated a story in which Satyavana, an enlightened rishi, gradually developed a cruel disposition since a friend left some weapons with him. The way of rishis was, indeed, to study



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life and nature without preoccupations. Forgetting that they were victims of their monstrous neighbours, they devoted themselves to the pursuit of knowledge without rest and diversion. The Vedas are regarded as the revealed word, because the rishis who had created the Vedas had reduced themselves to that state of innocent earnestness which transcends all transcendentalism.

History records that even after ages, Alexander approached some such nude thinkers in Taxila after his victory over Puru. These thinkers regarded even clothes as an artificiality to be avoided. Alexander wondered over the detachment with which these were absorbed in contemplation. Some of them, however, agreed to accompany Alexander to Greece, to meet cynics like Diogenes.

The age in which Rama went to the forests was not much removed from the age of the earliest seers. It was the age, when the first drama of Aryan settlement was being enacted once again in the South. Valmiki's hero was to revive the first zeal by which Manu, Yayati, Nahusha, Mandhata, and Bhagiratha had established man firmly on this subcontinent after the deluge. Yet he had to unlearn a good deal before he could know the laws of a creative life. Ayodhya had been on his mind all this time, and country folk and the bordering tribes like the Guhas had accosted him only as the best of men. A shaking was necessary to the self-complacency in the beloved prince who expected nothing but kind regards everywhere. The wilderness yawned before him, and virtues of a civilised prince were not unlikely to prove as weaknesses. Laws of wild nature are quite different from those observed in tamed life, and the prince was soon disillusioned of the social dignity which had made him only less eager to accept the demands of life in the wilderness.

### III

## THE OGRES

Rama had hardly gone a few yards in the wilderness when Viradha, a monster, seized Sita and stood like a rock in the way of Rama and Lakshmana. He was too formidable and the arrows that Rama threw at him were incapable of bringing him down. The arrows pierced through him, but the giant stood smiling with a yawn to tell Rama that he had better leave Sita there and run for life. The monster declared that the two brothers were truants and had no right to keep such a beautiful lady with them. The sight of Sita in Viradha's arms baffled Rama, and the prince of Ayodhya felt that social dignity which he had enjoyed everywhere and the arms that availed him in all combats, were too insignificant against a giant of the wilderness. Despair and frustration overpowered Rama, when Lakshmana who had seldom yielded to scruples which had ever been Rama's consideration, called upon Rama to be his own master. Violent actions were needed for coping with evil and Rama should not feel unequal to the giant, he said. The monster in the meanwhile told them that the creator had made him invulnerable against all weapons, and arrows were of no avail against him. The two brothers drew their sharp swords and struck at the giant, who, leaving Sita behind, lifted them on his shoulders and ran towards the interior of the forest. Sita's cries in the wilderness made Rama restless, but Lakshmana once again asked Rama to be violent to the degree required against the giant. Both the brothers worked their swords relentlessly till the arms fell from the giant's body, and using more than manly force, Rama and Lakshmana struck the giant with swords, arrows, hands and feet, and levelled him. Getting over him, Rama planted his foot over his neck and asked Lakshmana to dig a deep pit and bury the monster as he

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was. Brute force against the Brute was the only solution. The pit being ready, the giant was pushed into it amidst hues and cries that filled the forest. The dying giant disclosed that he was a Gandharva, who under a curse from Kubera, god of wealth, had been a monster and was now quite in his senses to recognise Rama as the promised saviour of humanity. The giant instructed Rama to go to the hermitage of Sharabhanga where Rama's mission of life would be disclosed to him.

Rama's encounter with Viradha deserves a deeper study. The giant disclosed that his parents were "Java" and "Shatahrada". The word Java signifies force and movement, and Shatahrada means a cloud having a hundred gulfs. The monster born of these parents was gifted with immunity from injury by weapons that were regarded fatal against men. The monster was alive inspite of the terrible cuts and wounds that he received. The story of Rama's encounter with Viradha is much like the Norse Legend where Thor encounters the giant Skrymir while the giant was asleep. Thor struck the giant's face with the hammer and the giant rubbed his face looking up as if a leaf had fallen on him. At another more terrible stroke, the giant looked us as if a grain of sand had fallen. Viradha is a die-hard like the Skrymir whom critics believed to be the old chaotic rocky earth in person. But the encounter with Viradha is no allegory. Valmiki is describing the early inhabitants in the same spirit in which Thoreau, an American thinker, describes a few of the early inhabitants in the Walden forest where Thoreau went to live for a few years. Viradha is the son of wilderness but he is a real giant and is a die-hard as giants were in the primitive ages. Rama was not a primitive man. He was a warrior of the Solar race, a race whom the Sun-god had inspired to combat darkness in all forms. Aryan life in Ayodhya and around it had progressed a good deal in evolving high ideals, but this progress had also accumulated certain weakness in the Aryan race in so far as the princes forgot the rude elements of earthly life, namely the strength of the forest-feller, which the child of cloud possessed. Rama recovered qualities of the primitive man and declared significantly enough that the giant was going over a path which they were to adopt in the thick wilderness. This is the lesson which the encounter with a giant of the wilderness teaches Rama. Rama's victory over Viradha was due to Rama's recovery

of sturdiness. The incident is replete with information about the age. The earlier inhabitants buried the dead ones, for the giant was happy to be accorded the burial which was dear to his race. Heads of beasts like tigers, wolves, deers, and the elephant which the giant carried on his trident, might yield some meaning to an imaginative mind, but these are evidently a decorative insignia for a chief of the giants who killed man and beast in sport. Viradha is a fact and like all facts of those primitive days, looks like an allegory. The poet who had recalled some myths in his first book and had given us some history in the second book, was now giving us some facts about the first days of man on the earth. The allegorical literature of ancient India, which is available to us today, is always an attempt to popularise a philosophy or a cult. One of the most popular and, indeed, very inspiring allegorical poems in the Markandeya Purana, is the *Durga Saptashati* in which many giants are killed by the goddess of righteous war. In that allegorical poem, Mahishasura or the Buffalo-monster, Dhumra-Lochana, or the smoke-eyed, and the Raktavija or one born of blood, are all allegorical figures and a conquest of Dharma is apparent in every encounter of Durga with the Asuras. Viradha of the *Ramayana* is an ogre, simple and pure. Sita called upon the giant to leave Rama and Lakshmana and to have her in their place, but the ogre left her alone and was happy in possessing the two princes. There are Ogres in all old literatures and Valmiki's Ogre is one of the earliest. The poet had looked to the Vedas for describing the civilised urban life in Ayodhya. He had appreciated the evolution of thought in the Aryan society. He was happy to record that truth, self-discipline and non-violence, were the spirit behind the social ideals of the Aryan race. Sita, who herself may be regarded as the soul of the Vedic civilisation, had reminded Rama of these virtues. But in the new conditions of a forest life, where evil was growing to monstrous dimensions, some of the old altruistic platitudes, beautiful and convenient for a civilised people, were of little avail. The poet could not be blind to the new lessons which a great hero, in whom activity had not been buried under the weight of good-for-nothing dogmas, was learning much from his contact with the barbarians of his times.

In these encounters in the Aranya Kandam, the poet has also recorded how thought took shape in the eager minds of those



days. The discussions about fate as given in this book of the *Ramayana* is a beautiful instance of how impressions received afresh from nature were working to revolutionise a community's thoughts. Lakshmana's consolations to Rama in the name of a fixed design in nature speak enough of the history of such ideas as these were born. With the intensity of an ascetic, Lakshmana had closely watched every event in the life of nature. He had observed the regularity with which the Sun and the Moon rose and set, the stars shone and disappeared, and the rivers swelled and ebbed. He had also watched that the most powerful luminaries like the Sun and the Moon were regularly eclipsed, and the earth often suffered earthquake-shocks. All these phenomena could not fail to convince Lakshmana that there was a force behind all these events. We can only wonder at the intellect of the great poet who was recalling all these observations of the early man, and was preserving for us the premises of the first arguments rising in the human mind.

A collection of wild life and wilder thought was the poet's gift to the readers of the *Ramayana*, but all these gifts were to be presented in an orderly way, and exhibited with proper relief and setting. The poet linked all his observations with the events of the hero's life in the forest. The Aranya Kanda is decidedly another success in the architectural design of the great poem. The encounter with Viradha calls upon Rama to be truly valorous in the face of wild nature and wilder ogres. The lesson, like all lessons, would take time to be fully assimilated. Sita's abduction later in this book, hammers the lesson more bluntly into Rama's head. Wonderful is the artist's pen which describes Rama's duty against the scheme of things. Rama would carry destruction all round, sparing neither the innocent nor the wicked in the region. He looked terrible even to Lakshmana who had always called upon his elder brother to be more valiant than considerate. The lesson had gone to the bones and had fired the whole being of the hero with a fighting impulse. This was ferocity rather than true valour, and Lakshmana was at pains to remind Rama on the force of destiny about which Rama himself had talked to Lakshmana at the time of his exile. Rama's company had tamed Lakshmana a little, but the law of the jungle had printed its impression too deep on Rama's mind. When Rama was going furious, the poet brings another Ogre—Kabandha, a headless

trunk, who being put to fire, reminded Rama to recover his self-possession. The Ogre disclosed that destiny was not unkind to Rama and that Rama's friendship with Sugriva, the Vanara chief, in the near future would be of great help to him. Ogre in the beginning and Ogre at the end of the book with new awakenings in the hero's mind speak of the constructive scheme in the poet's mind. Kabandha's disclosures are interesting. The information that he imparts to Rama about the Vanara chief Sugriva is valuable. Sugriva had been a great adventurer. In his youth he had travelled widely and was familiar with every region. Valmiki's mention of this great tribal chief links the third book of the *Ramayana* with the next book. The poet is conscious of the turn in the theme of his poem. The lapse of time between Kabandha's prophetic counsel after the climax event of Rama's life and the events of Kishkindha Kanda, give a breathing space to the epic Muse, before she is engaged in the tremendous war-activity of the later books.

#### IV

### SOME NOBLER THOUGHTS

In the Aranya Kandam, the poet is narrating a long-term exile. Had he not observed a remarkable brevity in describing a few interesting episodes in the forest, the hero's movement from one hermitage to another would have been a monotonous theme.

An encounter with an Ogre, parleys with celebrated saints, an intimate talk between the two brothers or between the hero and his wife engage the poet's as well as his readers' attention, while miles over the Dandakaranya are covered. The vast tract of wilderness, with an area much larger than eighty thousand square miles of the Dandakaranya now extending over regions known as Hyderabad, Orissa, Bihar and Bombay, must have been a wide field for the hero to hunt some terrible monsters and beasts every day, but the poet has shown a marvellous restraint in the choice of his details. He has confined himself to the nobler thoughts that were inspired in the minds of the three wanderers, while they visited the penance groves of those enlightened ascetics.

The verse moves gently and maintains an impression of the heaviness of the long term. Still, however, the poem covers a period of ten years within three hundred verses as the hero moves from the hermitages of Sharabhanga and Sutikshna to Agastya's. A little questioning from Sita about Rama's growing concern over the Rakshasas' advance in the Dandaka forest discloses much about what had transpired in Rama's meetings with the hermits. The menace from the Rakshasas had burdened the hero's mind with baffling problems. Sita's noble sentiments in favour of a peaceful sojourn in the forest, are an expression of the eternal voice of civilisation within the heart of man to be able to do without war. In the gravity of this situation, however, an irrevocable decision had to be made by Rama to exterminate menace from the Rakshasas. Rama had championed the cause of those countless ascetics working for the advancement of knowledge.

Rama's brief reply to his beloved wife is a proof of the poet's constructive genius. No long discourse on the righteousness of war is needed from the hero whose actions were capable of translating his silent reflections on the voiceless agonies of the sages suffering at the hands of the monstrous evil. Art that contrived to raise the delicate questions through a voice dearest to Rama was also marking an irony of fate in the shape of events to come.

A thrill of despair must indeed have run through the core of Rama's heart to perceive that eternal moments were moving impetuously to shape a desperate remedy for a desperate disease. The grim resolve was, however, indicated before long, when the tender voice that fain would implore Rama to give up arms and be content with a peaceful forest sojourn, had to cry in the wilderness for armed help.

Sincerity is the note of the poetry of the Aranya Kanda. The strain of caution against adopting war as a means of exterminating evil is no self-deception on the part of the race. Sita's implorings are overflowing with a genuine feeling of love for all mankind. Meditation on the Gayatri verse every morning and evening had filled the Aryan warriors with a deep respect for the rule of wisdom and justice. Every vedic ritual started with a prayer to Vishvedevas, or cosmic deities, among whom the benign Mothers were invoked to bless man with the milk of human kindness. The sages who had related the tales of woe to Rama had also told him that for all that they suffered, violence had not been their choice, as it interfered with their vision of truth. Humanity might well be proud of this urge for spiritual forgiveness. The ritualistic Grihyasutras, and the philosophical aphorisms, which have claimed a nearer historical link with the Vedas had failed to convey in full this great message from the vedic age. Ayodhya Kanda and Aranya Kanda, as two expressions of the same sentiment, are indeed two facets of a great civilisation. In the royal palaces where the Vedas were chanted every morning, the princes had learnt to value peace and would rather renounce a throne than indulge in an internecine warfare. In the forests, sages would snatch moments of tranquillity from life at every peril of life. This moral tone of this great epic as noticed, is an eternal inspiration for poets and scholars alike. Purity of ideas and nobility of sentiments in the *Ramayana* are characteristic of the vedic age of which Valmiki was the only poet to sing. The Maha-



*bharata*, too, which had nearly missed to note this nobler mode of the vedic civilisation had recorded the life history of Vasishtha who suffered so much at the hands of Vishvamitra and moved from place to place to ease his heart of rancour against Vishvamitra. Even when Vishvamitra had destroyed all the sons of the great Vasishtha, the latter instead of cursing Vishvamitra in return, threw himself over rocks and into the rivers for being unable to bear the calamity. This spirit of quiet suffering for personal cause had spread through every home in the Vedic age. Sita's narration of the life of a saint who suffered a spiritual downfall, when a sword was kept with him as a trust, speaks of the extent to which non-violence had been appreciated. Even ladies were narrating stories to disabuse the warriors' minds of any ideas of unnecessary violence.

It will be an unfair estimate of humanity to regard all ideas of non-violence as the gift of a Buddha or a Christ. The eternal human mind, out of which spring all Buddhistic or Christian notions of moral life, was always conscious of the value of such notions. The *Ramayana* speaks of the earliest birth of these ideas in the dawn of Aryan civilisation. The rational view of life, expressed by the priest Jabala in Ayodhya Kanda on the occasion of Bharata's request to Rama to return to Ayodhya, is similarly another instance of the timelessness of all ideas which in later ages were shaped into particular religions and philosophies.

Another such instance of early existence of ideas which were later shaped into particular schools of thought may be found in Rama's meeting with Sharabhangha. Rama's arrival at Sharabhangha's hermitage was hailed by gods and sages alike. Within Rama's hearing, god Indra had whispered to the sage that Rama was destined to be victorious and was to achieve the aim of his life through mighty deeds beyond the scope of others. Rama's vision of Indra at Sharabhangha's hermitage is another mark of Valmiki's creative genius. Here was a confirmation of Rama's place in the history of mankind and gods. In trying combats, even the most valiant of men was likely to feel unequal to his formidable adversaries. Rama had once felt uncertain of his strength in his encounter with the monster Viradha, and though his victory over the giant Cannibal had restored in him his self-confidence, his despondency could revisit him in any future encounter. With Indra's whisper, Rama's recovery of his self-con-

fidence was complete. This was followed by revelation of a hope from eternity. Sharabhanga's resurrection, after his physical body had been consumed by fire, was a practical demonstration of the immortality of the human soul. In pursuit of his mission, Sharabhanga had sacrificed comforts and had even declined Indra's invitation to him to the abode of gods. This supreme example was better than a hundred precepts, and Rama rightly grew conscious of his immortal role in the history of mankind. When the great sage offered to bequeath the fruit of his long penances to Rama, Rama firmly refused to accept the glorious prize of a heavenly life. To appreciate the purpose of Rama's meeting with the sage, one need recall the long discourse of the holy Gita, in spite of which Arjuna could not be rescued from his spiritual crisis, till a 'vision' of the cosmic man was inspired in him for supporting all that had been preached through tenets of abstract philosophy. Rama's vision in Sharabhanga's hermitage proves how poetry has the power to condense in a nut-shell all that philosophy has ever been able to teach through the ages.

## V

### A FORERUNNER TO THE WAR EPIC

Contact with Agastya was the last step in shaping the purpose of Rama's life. Practical instructions from the great sage finalized Rama's plans and he settled in one of the thickest groves waiting for an opportunity to execute his plans.

The opportunity was soon provided by Shurpanakha, Ravana's sister. When Rama was marking the beauty of Autumn in the company of his wife and brother, the ill-shaped old hag came to them like the malicious fate that once had come to them in the form of Manthara on the eve of Rama's coronation. Valmiki shows a fine sense of humour in depicting her graces, of which she seems to be proud. Offer of love from this elder sister of Ravana at the fag end of her demoniacal old age was indeed fit for a satire and Valmiki gives us the specimen of a satire which is so rare in Sanskrit poetry. The change of meanings in words by changes of prefixes provides wit which could only be peculiar to Sanskrit.

Thus, love of the ugly-faced for the well-faced, of the large-bellied for the fine waisted, of the fearful-eyed for the large-eyed, of the copper-haired for the fine-haired, and of the old hag for the handsome youth, was what made Rama a little light-hearted, and he directed her to Lakshmana who, after having flattered her with all the epithets that were worthy of Sita, failed to awaken in her the sense of a complete destitution of form and grace. When he finally chopped off her nose and ears, he only sent a challenge to the monster world for an open fight.

The challenge was carried in a voice that rang through the forest and over the seas. It is a fine conceit of poetry to make that frustrated Shurpanakha the mouth-piece of Rama's challenge that sounded a bugle for a long delayed war.

Wherever she goes, she carries a trumpet on behalf of Rama. The unthinking old woman, who had all her life lived under a

belief that she was a prized beauty and that her brothers were the most powerful heroes on earth, was soon crying with despairing realisation that her brothers were unequal to the handsome man who had disappointed her and had punished her for her evil intentions. Valmiki was happy to describe Rama's personal and natural qualities through this sister of Ravana who told her brother Khara that the Rakshasa-race was in danger of extinction, if they continued to live in Janasthana. She had witnessed Rama's valour in killing the fourteen thousand warriors in the twinkling of an eye.

The fore-runner to the war-epic in the Aranya Kanda, shows the poet's power in displaying the hero's skill in war. The boastful cries of Khara are in proportion with the reign of terror he had been carrying on in the Dandakaranya. Loss of his fourteen thousand warriors had finally driven him to the fore-front of a pitched battle. The long list of ill-omened sights and sounds when Khara marched to the battle, magnifies the dimensions of the battle. One might think of its parallel in the omens on the eve of the Ides of March in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Khara's march was a death-knell to Rakshasas' supremacy in the forests. The terrible odds of fourteen thousand against Rama had made gods anxious about Rama's safety. Rama, who had come out victorious out of a storm of maces, swords, daggers, lances, axes, sickles, stones and tree trunks, had earned the gratitude of the sages and praises from gods above. His buoyancy was expressed in his boastful challenge to Khara. Valmiki has heightened the Vira-rasa, or the martial sentiment, by describing Rama as making loud war-cries. Brevity of description is worthy of the quick disposal of the hosts of warriors by Rama. Rama's speed in loading and discharging his arrows, routed and thinned the armies, but his hurricane pursuit of the fleeing enemy spared only few of those engaged in the battle. Trishira and Khara had met death, when Rama smilingly emerged out of the war with his body covered with wounds and scars.



## VI

### THE CLIMAX-EVENT

The Aranya Kandam was probably the poet's most serious piece of composition. Like Rama's wanderings in the forest, poetry in the Aranya Kandam has depth of meaning and purpose. This book of the *Ramayana* is more of a forest-preserve for various specimens of poetry, than a mere wilderness of design. From subjects like the psychological transformation of the hero's personality and light and sensuous love of nature, the poet comes to the more skilful display of epic elements of his great theme. This was not the end of his ambitions in the field of poetry. His book was to record the redemption of a race from long suffering. A federation of heartless tyrants in wild manoeuvres had carried their inhuman exploits through the length and breadth of the Indian sub-continent. The retrograde giant-warriors, working as Ravana's lieutenants, had been marshalling all the specimens of perverse brutality against a peace-loving race whose thinkers had spent generations in founding great principles of justice and truth. There is a serious effort on the part of the poet for producing effects proportionate to the gravity of the situation. Before Sita's abduction, which is the climax event of the epic, Ravana, the villain of the piece, is described in every detail of his character through the eyes of the villain's sister and the villain's accomplice Maricha. Though once a mighty hero who had fought against gods and men, Ravana had been most negligent in his duties as a king. He had been pursuing a life of indulgence, and his activities had been directed to foil all good plannings of his saintly neighbours. He had won power by sacrifices, but he was an arch-enemy of all Yajnas. His ministers were flatterers, and the good ministers like Vibhishana were not allowed to give their counsel. He had abducted the wives of others and had been notorious all over the world for his tyranny. Ravana's physical build was as dark as his mental outlook. Rama,

on the other hand, possessed physical charm coupled with good intentions. His skill in arms had, within a few minutes, granted a permanent safety to all the hermits of the Dandaka forest by killing fourteen thousand of the monsters led by Khara and Dushana. Rama's mighty arms, broad chest and fiery looks, were a terror for the wicked. There was none amongst gods or men who could afford to pick up a quarrel with the noble Rama, who was certainly free from all blemishes, faults and weaknesses which Ravana had imagined about Dasharatha's son. The warrior was matchless in arms and was the ornament of the race of men. His wife was fond of him and his powerful brother was proud of obeying him. Victory for Rama was a foregone conclusion of Maricha who had tasted the force of Rama's arrows once when Rama was only a boy.

Valmiki was proclaiming the high birth and higher merits of his hero through these two heralds of war, before the climax event justified Nature's frowns against the long standing plague of humanity. It was not the national victory of the Aryan, over a neighbouring race, that was the subject of the great epic. Valmiki's conception of an epic was as universal as Milton's though it was more realistic and factual. The Creator was as much a participant in the war against evil as nature and humanity. The Indian sages, who reflected on divinity in their morning meditations, knew how in the flow of eternal time there are moments that sound the death-knell of the ruling monstrous evil of the time. Sita's abduction marked such a moment. It was the climax event not only in Rama's life, but in the life of nature whose eternal laws had been shaken by the pest growing to the extent of blighting the fairest flower of humanity.

The event of abduction shows Valmiki's power of a classical restraint in poetry. Sita had been only too cordial and hospitable to Ravana, who had come in the guise of a hermit. She offered the proverbial Hindu wife's gifts of water and meals to him. Her charming personality and courtesy were the relief given to mark the darkness of the monster's designs against her. It was, indeed, a bully that could burst out in loud boasts of his power to set fire to the ocean and to bring down the firmament. All these boasts were to frighten a young lady who had innocently pinned her faith in the yellow robes of a hermit. Hell was uncovered, when Ravana struck his hand together to advance towards Sita. The

monster grew hydra-headed and with twenty arms, stood high to seize the dark-eyed and beautifully dressed princess of Mithila. The thief bragging of his personal charms in the same breath might remind one of Satan's pledge to tempt mankind. The soul of humanity here was being coerced to wed the eternal enemy of man. Indian womanhood had often stood bold in such crucial moments. Moral courage of Padmini against Ala-ud-Din and of Durgavati against Akbar are only two of the many historical instances of indication of Indian women's honour. Sita was one of the earliest in the line of Savitri, Arundhati and Anasuya, who had recoiled from accepting even gods as their lovers, when once they had cast their lots with ascetics. Rama was an exile, but he was still Sita's dearest claim in her life. She was ablaze with her helpless rage against the tempter who was now brutally forcing her away and she made frantic efforts to escape the grips of the giant.

For the poet, Ravana's seizure of Sita was not a 'fait accompli'. It hailed the day of reckoning for the long-standing perpetrator of heinous crimes. The act was pregnant with dire consequences. It was as ill-omened as the conjunction of Mercury with Rohini or seizure of sunlight by some shadow, or handling of the queen serpent by a fool, or a challenge to the revealed truth by a rationalist. It was, in all respects, an attempt by a slave of passions on the passionless.

In Jatayu's valiant, yet suicidal attack on the king of monsters, the poet got time to heighten the effects of his restraint in his passion. Courtesy, appeals, flattery, charges and challenges from the far-sighted bird only disclose the uglier depths of the monster's hard-heartedness. The bird's ravages are substantial, but frustrated Ravana's sword puts an end to nature's humble protest. The villain absconds, while Sita's eyes in search for Rama on the distant paths, are filled with tears at the plight of the wingless and clawless bird, gasping for its few closing breaths.

Once again, poetry is impatient to cope with the magnitude of the portentous event. Beasts vainly ran in despair after Ravana's flight through space, as Sita's grips at the branches of the trees were loosened by the monster's speed. While Ravana pulled her hair to drag her away from her supports, the wind stopped blowing in that moment. The sun grew dim, and the dwellers in the forest questioned the existence of law and truth. The Creator felt that his purpose in creating Sita was achieved, for the last atro-

cious act of Ravana was against Rama, the mighty Bow-wielder. All this agitation in the world of gods heightens the effect of poetry, which, with sustained imagination, creates simile after simile to aptly describe the anguished recoilings of a delicate sapling of a woman within the giant's arms. She was the flash of lightning within a dark cloud, or with her yellow robes flying in air, she was a flame coming out of a dark volcano; or she was the beautiful moon tearing itself out of the dark clouds. Her ornaments fell like pieces of meteors and her garland fell through space like the holy Ganga.

All these parallels were the result of a keen observation of life and nature. The poet's description of the flight is graphically realistic. To crown all details is the description of the flowers that, falling from Sita, caught the speed of Ravana's flight and pursued the monster.

The gauntlet thrown by Rama was only so covertly accepted by Ravana. As Sita was lodged in Lanka, the sirens sounded through the clouds calling upon Rama to trace the thief and rid humanity of the strongest monster of the times.

Unique is the place of this climax piece in world's literature. Out of Sita's frantic efforts to disengage herself from the monster's grip, peep a presence of mind and a confidence worthy of a maturer wisdom. Innocence and simplicity with which she had narrated her life story to Ravana in hermit's disguise or with which she had expressed her concern over her husband's safety and had charged Lakshmana as having evil intentions against her, are soon buried in the awakening call to her real personality, which she had developed in her contact with the saintly woman like Anasuya. Her comfortable life in her father's house, the care and luxury which she had enjoyed in Dasharatha's palaces and the protection felt in Rama's company in the forest, had not made her altogether a tender creature only to be hysterically frightened at a peril. Helen's love of the praise even from her kidnapper was not in the blood of the Indian heroine and a compromise surrender to a warrior till her rescue, as was the choice of the heroine of Iliad, was far from Sita's mind.

A firmness which she had inherited from the mother earth, and a sternness which ascetics had inspired in her, had gone a long way to plant the seeds of an eternal hope in the princess who was discovered in the furrows of a dry field in the days of a



frightful drought. The faith which she had in her husband's might and the love that she bore to him were of the nature of an assurance which is always present in the visions of toiling men and women. For such were, indeed, her parents in their peasant life when Sita was born. She called on the forest deities and scattered her flowers and ornaments in the hope of guiding Rama to the land of the tyrant. Her threats to Ravana were not idle curses and empty reproaches. In every syllable of her address to the monster, she was reminding Ravana of the power of Rama's mighty bow. In her cries, there was a calling to witness of the guardians of the world to see if such crimes could be perpetrated under the open skies.

Valmiki was not writing a fiction. He did not develop the temperamental weakness of Sita to its logical conclusion so that her seizure by Ravana would bring her to a tragic surrender to the relentless fate which she herself had invited. On the other hand, the heroine here was rising to a magnitude worthy of the hero's companionship.

The pitch of the climax touched its apex, where, on finding his cottage deserted, Rama was mad with rage. He would carry on indiscriminate bloodshed to avenge the inhuman wrong. Soon messengers from the infinite came to declare that it was not worthy of the dimensions of his personality to be rash as to associate all beings with the crimes of an individual. With Rama's pacification, the poet's noble anger once again was under restraint. Instead of writing with gall about the desperate war-preparation, the poet writes joyfully of the beauties of nature on the way to Pampa Lake. The heroine's faith in Rama and Rama's faith in the eternal design kept in abeyance the fury that such a climax would have brought in its train. The poet whose poetic career had been inspired in a furious outburst of passion against the powers that be, had, during the growth of his epic in honour of Rama and pious Sita, been much enlightened about the secrets of a glorious life. This enlightenment bore an imprint on his art. His poem remained free from the gloom, that such a climax should have cast on it.

Homer, too, was inspired by a noble wrath against the ordainers of Man's fate or the gods who have hecatombs of human hearts merely for their sport, but Homer could not conceal his passion behind his art.

Valmiki, on the other hand, had full confidence in his mighty hero. His positive hope was born of a greater spiritual experience in the race. The confirmation of a faith that evil has no lasting existence was a historical fact for Valmiki and the people for whom he wrote. Rama had done the deeds expected of him. The rishis, who had long been waiting for this hero's birth, and had imparted to him the secrets of life and power, when he came to the forests, were the pillars of the eternal throne of the goddess of poetry in India. No tragedy, thus, was ever a theme of the Indian Muse. The gods that these seers invoked were always kind to send a saviour to us in every hour of our need. Indra, Vishnu, Vamana, the warrior sage Rama, Hero Rama, Krishna, the sage Buddha and our last saviour, Mahatma Gandhi, have from time to time confirmed our people's faith in the guardians of our land. It was quite natural for Valmiki to sing the meritorious deeds of Rama with an elation that is absent in the other epics of the world. The evil in the *Ramayana* was not the master force as it was in the *Paradise Lost*.

## VII

### NATURE AS A HEALER OF HUMAN WOES

In the Aranyakandam, the poet discovers the healing power of nature. Memory of sad incidents of Ayodhya was gradually fading out of Rama's mind, and he was happy to mark the beauty of the blooming forests. The great sage Sutikshna, who guided Rama in his forest life as affectionately as the sage Vishvamitra had done in the hero's earlier life, advises Rama to visit the beauty spots of the forests. These were the resorts of the sages who had attained self-realisation, and lived only to fulfil aims worthy of the last stage of man's life when his enlightenment should be an inspiring link between the past, the passing and the coming timeless ages. The poet, himself an enlightened seer, makes the epic Muse narrate Rama's exile as one long stretched span related to the cosmic purpose, as cycles of seasons are, for ever, related to eternity. Fragrant shrubs and trees laden with flowers and fruits grew in abundance on the way to these hermits. Beasts in the forest moved as contented as pets, and birds on the trees were brooding in sympathy with the peaceful surroundings. Water fowls were sporting in the numberless ponds whose broad surface exhaled the fragrance of the floating lilies. Noise of the sprouts gushing from the mountain sides joined the lonely din of the peacocks to make the forest alive with sweet choruses. The grove on the way to Agastya's hermitage resounded with the music of an Aeolian harp. An exquisite melody arose out of a pond where nymphs were believed to have their water-sports to please the invisible sage, Mandakarni. Agastya's hermitage itself was a beauty-spot and another strikingly beautiful spot was the 'Panchavati' with five huge Nyagrodha trees which Rama selected as the site for his thatched cottage. It was quite near the Godavari and was not at all far from the hills. Flowers, fruits and herbs made the spot richly fragrant. Water-lilies decorated the ponds. Trees laden with blossoms grew on both sides of the

river. Swans, water-fowls, and Chakravaka had flocked along the banks of the stream. Caves were resounding with the peacock-din, while beasts crowded nearer the streams. Slopes of the hills were covered with blooming trees. Sparkling with ores of different metals, the land appeared golden here, silvery and copper-coloured there. The speckled elephants raising their heads out of it looked like painted shutters. The spot was holy as trees like sals, tala, Tamala, Khajura (Palm), Panasa, Amara, Chutamango, Ashoka, Pilaka, Champaka, Ketaka, Khardira, Shami, Kimshuka and Patala grew there. Large varieties of birds and animals were also found there.

It was here in the thatched cottage that Rama was happy to find himself a part and parcel of nature around him. Rama's contact with Jatayu was only an instance of his links with the world of birds. Fauna and Flora of the Southern forest were casting a spell on Rama's mind, and he was happy to find time rolling round him in a beautiful pageant of marching seasons. Dewy season was over and Lakshmana was happy to point out to Rama the golden beauty of the autumn evenings and the morns, the time, if we were to recall Shelley's *Spirit of Delight*, "when the golden mists are born". A poet so seriously engaged in the theme of an epic, relaxes in such a fresh strain of poetry as is found only in poets like Shelley and Keats. Poetry here reflects over the joy of the valiant heroes who march on their conquering expeditions in this pleasant season of the year. The poet's description of Autumn in *Aranyakandam* is a beautiful ode, as vigorous in imagination as Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'.

"Pleasant for strolls are the noons, when,  
With their comforting touch, all around  
The days are blessed in the shine,  
Cursed are the shades and showers".

(Ramayana, Aranya Kanda Sarga 16, verse 10)

This may be faultlessly rendered in Shelley's words:

"The day becomes more solemn and serene  
When noon is past—There is a harmony  
In Autumn, and a lustre in its sky".

(Shelley's *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*).



## NATURE AS A HEALER OF HUMAN WOES

Beauty of Autumn so wistfully appreciated by Keats in

“Season of mists and mellow-fruitfulness,

‘Close-bosom friend of the maturing sun’

had as sensuous an appeal for Valmiki in the lines:

“Light sunshine, mists, the growing cold and winds

Make desolate the snow-buried forests; days are  
pleasant still”.

When

‘Bleak at dawn, at noon comforting to touch,

The golden light stretches over the earth,

And, serene with rosy rays at eve, distant

Scatters its hues over the plains”.

This is what Keats, too, could observe about the Autumn in the lines;

“While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,

And touch the stubble plain with rosy hue”. (Keats)

The lines;

“Mist-covered forests, rich with harvests of Barley  
and Wheat,

Bright at sunrise, loud with noise of herons and cranes”.

(Valmiki). —

well recall Keats’ autumnal songs:

“Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?

Think not of them thou hast thy music too”.

Ripeness of the maturing season in Keats’ lines —

“To load with apples the moss’d cottage trees

And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core”. —

has well been foreshadowed in Valmiki’s

“With palm-fruit-shaped tops and heavily loaded,

So beautiful the bent rice-crops, golden hued”.

Yet, the first poet of the World, Valmiki, remains the supreme poet of nature. He describes the sun on a misty day as more pleasant than the moon at night.

“Scattering rays over the snow, through mist gliding

The far-off rising sun almost moon-like appears.”

(Valmiki)

Still the moon itself shines so dull on a misty night

"Its fortune usurped by the sun,

The mist-surrounded orbit of the moon

As it were a breath-bedimmed mirror,

Shines absolutely without lustre".

Bitter cold again, in Valmiki's description of autumn, is as living a sensation as may be felt in Keats, whose representation of sensations remains unmatched in modern poetry.

The lines in Valmiki:

"Touching cold waters, leisurely, the elephant wild,

However thirsty he might be, soon withdraws his trunk"

may well be compared with following lines in Keats'

"The Eve of St. Agnes;

Ah, bitter cold it was.

The owl, for all his feathers, was accold,

The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass

Silent was the flock in woolly fold,

Numb were the Beadsmen's fingers, while he told,

His rosary;-----"

In these reflections on the beauty of nature, Valmiki is looking for the secret of a happy life. Trying moments of life, like the bleak seasons of the year, have beauties of their own. Rama's love of nature is a great relief to him, and whenever his mind is haunted by phantoms of the past, the ever fresh face of nature in and around Dandaka is a challenge to him to forgive and forget all those rancours in his mind. Rama is happy to watch the beauty of the snow-covered mountains, and he also implores his brother to forget Kaikeyi's unkindness and to recall only those personalities like the noble Bharata and the truthful Dasharatha who inspire Rama to elevating reflections. These reflections of Rama have been recorded by Valmiki's Muse in such soft melodies as are worthy of any poet of nature.

As before, so after the climax, Nature comes to relieve Rama's mind burdened with trials. Flowers are mentioned in every section of the book, Sita was innocently engaged in picking rare species of flowers, when the golden deer attracted her attention. Even when Ravana is forcibly carrying her, this child of nature

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cannot relinquish her love of flowers and trees. She casts her looks at the beauty of forests and rivers and hopes to discover a rescuing hand out of them. She is confident of her husband's love for flowers and scatters her collections of the day on the way, where, indeed, Rama even in his most desolate mood looks up for them on the forest tracks. Beauty of groves towards the west of the south region goes a long way in helping Rama to recover from his agonies of separation from Sita. Once again Jambu, Priyala, Panasa, Palusha, Nyagrodha, Tinduka, Ashvatha, Karnikara, Chuta, Dhanvana, Naga-tilaka, Naktamalka, Milashoka, Kadamba, Surakta and Partibhadra were blossoming with flowers on the hill sides. Frogs, Swans, water-fowls and rare varieties of fish in the ponds on the way to Matanga-hermitage speak of the beauty and freshness of nature ever inviting man to revitalise his mind through contact with her. Rama was advised by the monster Kabandha to visit these spots.

Pampa, with its unbroken sandy banks and fragrant water, was a panacea for all mental ills of man, and Rama was happy once again to find himself in the groves resonant with the cries of young elephants. Innocence and purity dwelt beside these ponds. Shabari, the old lady of these groves, had lived there in humble devotion to the sacred hermitage of those sages who had inspired her to live as a child of nature, offering hospitality to those who passed that way. Her courtesy to Rama could be an ideal to be cherished by all civilised women. It appears that Keats' words were meant to describe only such a lady, when he wrote;

"Her brothers were the craggy hills  
Her sisters larchen trees  
Alone with her great family  
She lived as she did please".

Valmiki's study of nature did not end with her beautiful growth. Nature has her dungeons, too, which like vices in human society, mark stagnation in her growth. While great sages and the simple Shabari represented the soul of the beautiful groves and clear lakes, the spirit of these dungeons moved in the form of monsters and cannibals. Kabandha, or the headless trunk, is a fine conception of the spirit of hunger. The monster's eye in the stomach is a pointer to this interpretation of the monster who sees and moves towards all objects like a python and filling

the whole groves with its foul breath, draws all creatures to its steel-grasp. These earlier children of nature, or the sons of Diti as the Vedas and Valmiki call them, for their emancipation look to the noblest son of the earth. Death to the Kabandha, as it was to Viradha, at the hands of Rama, transforms him to a spirit of beauty, and whatever had been a curse and a plague to man and nature alike turns out to be useful to them both.

The more we think of the Aranyakandam, the more deeply are we struck to find the poet's genius searching for a complete representation of the hero's life in the wilderness. Beauty, melody and rhythm would make poetry of any piece of imagination, but the truth alone could make Aranyakandam a great vision. Rama's transformation under the influence of Nature and the sages is the soul of this great section. Encounters with hybrid creatures and revelations about the mystery of Creation through Jatayu had widened the hero's association with life of nature. Evidently the hero had seen and experienced much during his long exile and the poet's familiarity with every holy spot, sequestered or inhabited, in the large tract of Dandakaranya bears a strong evidence of the poet's love of facts. Every mile of the thick forest seems to have been located by the poet's seeing eye! The spirit of the forest had appeared to the poet, as if it were, to point out to him every grove, lake and rock that the holy warrior had planted his foot on. Only a devoted regard for the place of hero's visits could give such a wide wandering to the poet's eye which was eager,

"To picture out the quaint and curious bending  
of fresh woodland alley, never ending  
Or by the bowery clefts and leafy shelves  
Guess where the jaunty streams refresh themselves".

(KEATS)

This tradition of Nature-poetry in India is as old as the Vedas wherein every hymn had recalled some beautiful aspect of Nature. Gorgeous beauty of the Dawn, starry waviness of the Night, with its wolf-cries, splendour of the Sun, and soothing ambrosia from the Moon, are familiar to all vedic readers. In his Aranya Kandam, Valmiki adds to these beautiful sights another reminiscence of a stray vedic hymn in which beauty of the forest had struck a seer with its mysterious evening sounds.



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"When, the grass-hopper replies and swells  
the shrill Cicada's voice,

Seeming to sound with tickling bells, the lady of the  
wood exults,";  
and

"Here one is calling to his cow, another there hath  
felled a tree,

At eve the dweller in the wood fancies that somebody  
has screamed.

"The Goddess never slays, unless some murderous  
enemy approach

Man eats of savoury fruit and then takes, even as  
he wills, his rest.

Now have I praised the Forest Queen, Sweet-scented  
redolent of balm.

The mother of all Sylvan things, who tills not but hath  
stores of food."

(R.V. X. 146)

## VIII

### THE POET AND HIS HERO

Before we study further the great poem, we should have a peep into the personality of the poet who elevated a state-craft theme of Rama's exile to an immortal theme of the human heart.

An epic writer is always something more than a mere representative of his age. He has certainly assimilated the traditional thought of his contemporaries and has also identified himself with the aims and ideals of the survivors of the elderly generation. Still there is something fresh and original in his visions which goad him to sing his theme in a manner that is an index of his unique personality. The holy Ganga, as Valmiki narrates, was drunk by the sage Jahnu and was released through his ears, or in other words, through openings nearer the brain. Ganga so released was Jahnavi or Jahnu's creation. Life, in likewise manner, is drunk by a great poet and is released with newer angularities bearing a print of the poet's visions.

Valmiki's maiden poetic utterance at the sight of a hunter shooting at a heron absorbed in conjugal happiness with its mate, speaks of him as the man before he was a poet. There is a painful rhythm in the bleeding verse which shot forth from the poet's lips as a curse on the hunter who had so callously cut short life's ravishing moments before their consummation. In tones of a wild inquiry into the cause of pain and pleasure in life, the poet speaks out the eternal riddle of life and death, with the force of an agony which runs through the second book. There is a bold challenge to the ordainers of destiny in the words "No more, O hunter, peace be thine for endless years. That thou hast killed, of the pair of herons, one so lost in love." Besides a heart-rending cry of despair akin to Hamlet's 'O cursed spite' here is an echo of a stir for finding a purpose behind this shape of things. It would be dogmatic and presumptuous to say that the poet found a solution to the baffling problem. There is a

charm in a riddle, and there is a pleasure in making attempts to solve it, but there is a beauty in keeping the Gordian knot intact after going round a few coils of it with a faith that all is not so baffling after all. Valmiki was not content to leave all his speculations on the riddle of life in an abstract form. He gave us a record of his observations on life around the growth, education and wanderings of the noblest warrior of all times, to let us see for ourselves what could make life a cherishable experience. Through the life story of Rama, the *Ramayana* attempts a study of the worth of human life. Ecstasies of conjugal love, joys of parental affection, fraternal devotion, and thrill of virtuous enterprise were all so well comprehended by the poet. Jealousies, state-craft and uncalled-for hostilities were also so well studied. Bharata's oaths in the Ayodhya Kanda record the poet's familiarity with lives of omissions, blunders, sins and crimes. Most of the virtues and vices, and joys and sorrows, as the poet must have observed, had their limitations in the circumstances and man was often a helpless victim to his impulses. Rama's exile was a decree of circumstances, while Dasharatha's sufferings came out of his unbridled fondness for his youngest queen. The real worth of life was to be found somewhere else. Living in harmony with nature alone could not give a clue to the secret of life, for nature's luxuriant plenty always reminded man of what he lacked. Freshness of the rainy season and beauty of spring and autumn had made Rama feel Sita's absence all the more acutely. Moreover, nature herself was only a victim of her impulses. Earthquakes, floods, eclipses, and famines, as Lakshmana points out to Rama in the Aranya Kanda, were the circumstances from which nature could never escape. The poet searched for the secret of the joy of life in the Vedas and was happy to find much in the revealed word that could inspire man through all ages. His proud confirmation of the vedic traditions in the theme of his poem is a proof of his search in the wisdom contained in the Vedas. But the poet was quite aware of the fact that newer generations would be getting stranger to real meanings of the vedic idiom. There was a growing misunderstanding about the vedic ideas and already popular myths had created a voluptuous personality of the benign god Indra. The myth of Ahalya was a pointer in that direction. Popular concepts of the primitive times, like the idea of a destiny, were similarly no convincing solutions

of the mysteries of life. Lakshmana's vehemence in challenging destiny at the time of Rama's exile is a proof of the poet's discontent with such primitive notions, for he almost spurned the idea of an over-ruling fate. In constant company with Rama, Lakshmana is indeed appreciably tamed to accept the notion of destiny himself, but it is all too late, for by this time Rama, who had been a protagonist of the concept, had furiously revolted against all forces that try to handle man as a mere puppet.

The man whose maiden verse was an outpouring of agony, displays a strange optimism in the theme of his great poem. The second book of the *Ramayana* is indeed surcharged with grief, but the characters maintain a strong hope in their adherence to lawful duty. The third book discloses a strange transformation in the hero's outlook on the claims of life. Rama had felt that narrow social measures, to which a civilised community had confined itself and had trusted its joys and sorrows, had hopelessly enslaved human endeavours. There was much under newer heavens that could provide a scope worthy of the native strength of Man with which the Creator had infused the primordial substance while shaping humanity out of it. They seers who had carried on their campaign of mastery over the forces of life while facing perils of extinction from the monsters, had effected this transformation.

Their transcendental beatitude had infused in him a magnanimity that looks on all possessions as encumbrances and all personal talents as instruments for removing human miseries. This instinct of a beneficent renunciation that the pious men of the forests had preserved in their bosoms could not fail to instil in Rama a spiritual will to dedicate his talents and skill in arms towards the establishment of an order of good and extermination of evil so that man could hope to live as a master and not as a slave to forces that shape conditions of human existence. Here the poet had found an answer to his questionings. This transformation in the hero's outlook on life from a personal anger against the enemy to impersonal vision of virtue rescued from the giant clutches of tyranny and enthroned in her inherent glory was the cause of the poet's optimism in the theme which otherwise might have carried on the painful cry of the poet's maiden verse.

The rishis in the outskirts of the Dandaka forest had rightly hailed Rama as the saviour of the race and had reminded him



## THE POET AND HIS HERO

that he was still the king and that his kingdom did not end with the bounds of Ayodhya, but extended over all the distant hills and forests. Though Sita's abduction by Ravana was a shock to his faith in his personality, he recovered from the shock after a bath in the holy lake.

## *Chapter VI*

### THE KISHKINDHA KANDAM

#### I

#### A SUMMARY

Rama entered Pampa forests, when spring had added charm to every tree, meadow and river. From the hills to the ponds, nature had enriched every spot with fragrance of forest flowers. All this should have made Rama so happy, but it only added to his sense of desolation, for Sita was not there with him. Birds seemed to call upon Rama to look for Sita who had enjoyed previous springs with him. Zephyr brought no balm to his tortured heart. Beasts and birds were all moving with mates, while Rama alone was without his life-companion. Lakshmana consoled Rama, and prayed to him to recover from his melancholic moods so that they could make a determined effort to rescue Sita.

In the meantime, movements of these two princes in the vicinity of Sugriva's cave on the Rishyamooka hill had frightened the Vanaras who ran helter-skelter warning their comrades that armed warriors were coming to ransack the Vanaras' groves. Sugriva, too, was pale with fear. Suspecting that these warriors were sent against him by his brother Bali, he asked his minister Hanuman to contact the mighty way-farers. Hanuman gave a good account of himself in his negotiations with Rama, who pointed out to Lakshmana the purity of language that marked Hanuman's speech. Hanuman was undoubtedly a widely read and experienced counsellor of Sugriva for whom Rama's friendship was soon promised.

Lakshmana narrated to Hanuman how king Dasharatha, who had been known for his lawful protection to people of all castes, had banished his eldest and noblest son Rama. Rama, who was

capable of giving protection to all creatures, had come hither to seek Sugriva's help for tracing his beloved wife, Sita, kidnapped by Ravana. Hanuman expressed his pleasure in discovering a friend like Rama, who was wise, peace-loving and self-disciplined. He told the two brothers that Sugriva would be only too glad to help Rama, through whose help in return Bali could be vanquished and Sugriva reinstated as the king. Hanuman then carried Rama and Lakshmana to Sugriva who was happy to know of Rama's eagerness to be a friend. Rama and Sugriva pledged support to each other's cause and a shake-hand ceremony was performed round the sacred fire produced by Hanuman out of two sticks rubbed together. Rama displayed his sharp arrows which were like thunderbolt. Rama would certainly kill Bali to restore Sugriva's wife and kingship.

Sugriva brought out some ornaments from the cave. These were Sita's belongings which she had scattered near Sugriva's place, while Ravana carried her through air. Lakshmana recognised the anklets which he had seen while he touched her feet every morning. Rama was moved to tears on seeing these ornaments. Sugriva comforted Rama assuring him that Sita would soon be traced and recovered. He called upon Rama to give up despair, which was unworthy of mighty warriors. Thanking Sugriva, Rama praised the spirit of true friendship which involved mutual obligations. Sugriva once again mentioned his sufferings and pleaded for immediate help.

Sugriva narrated how he had been living in Kishkindha as a faithful follower of his elder brother Bali who was known as a fighter. Mayavi, a son of Dundubhi, once challenged Bali to a fight. Followed by Sugriva, Bali chased Mayavi who entered an underground blind passage. Posting Sugriva at the entrance, Bali followed Mayavi. Nothing further was known to Sugriva about the fate of the two fighters. Sugriva had been waiting for Bali for a year when he saw a stream of blood gushing out of the crevice. He concluded that Bali had been killed in the combat. Closing the entrance with a piece of rock, Sugriva returned to Kishkindha where the ministers crowned him as the king. Bali returned after some time and, in a gathering of the public and ministers, narrated how Sugriva had blocked the passage against him. Sugriva was turned out of Kishkindha as an impostor. Sugriva's wife Ruma, too, was appropriated by Bali. As a forlorn

out-cast, Sugriva wandered widely over the earth, on this side of the hemisphere. Everytime Sugriva came to Kishkindha, Bali gave him severe beatings, for Bali was indeed matchless in might and was an implacable enemy. Dundubhi, who was verily a buffalo in strength and had challenged the Sea and Himalaya to duels, had once knocked at the gates of Kishkindha for having a free wrestling with Bali. Bali, who was having love sports with ladies of his palace, accepted the challenge. Taking the monster by the horns, he drove Dundubhi to and fro and finally pounded him to death. The dead giant lay flat like a bleeding buffalo. Bali hurled the dead monster to a distance, where sage Matanga had marked the bounds of his sacred hermitage. The sage was annoyed at the sacrilege of his Ashrama. Knowing that the miscreant was Bali, he uttered a curse that Bali would meet an instantaneous death, if he ever came to the mount Rishyamooka. Sugriva had his sojourn at Rishyamooka, where a few faithful ministers like Hanuman were attending on him.

While narrating these incidents of Bali's life, Sugriva felt diffident about Rama's capacity to kill Bali. Unless Rama could throw Dundubhi's skeleton at a distance of two hundred bow-lengths, and could also pierce one of the seven sala trees with an arrow, Sugriva could not feel convinced of Rama's prowess. To impress Sugriva with his physical strength, Rama kicked off Dundubhi's skeleton to a great distance, earning highest praises from the Vanara chief who looked on Rama as the greatest of warriors on earth.

Rama's skill in arms was confirmed when a single arrow pierced the seven sala trees and the ground beyond it. Encouraged by Rama's promise to shoot at Bali while engaged in combat with Sugriva, the latter called on Bali and once more had a humiliating escape to his cave. Rama followed Sugriva and appealed to him to once more challenge Bali. While engaged in the duel, Bali and Sugriva had looked so much like each other that Rama had failed to distinguish one from the other. This time Sugriva was garlanded and was prevailed to make yet another attempt to engage Bali.

The party moved once again to Kishkindha. On the way, Rama marked the beauty of forests, lakes, birds and beasts. A thick grove over which clouds were hanging low was pointed out by Sugriva as the resort of the sages known as Sapta Jana, or the



seven people. These sages had by great penances continued to live for seven hundred years. Their grove was beyond the reach of birds or beasts. Rama paid homage to the sacred spot. The party halted at a place from where Rama would watch the combat between the two Vanara chiefs. Sugriva was once more exhorted to go ahead with confidence.

This time Bali's wife, Tara, had a presentiment of a doom awaiting Bali. She argued that Sugriva was not a fool to risk his life every time. She had even heard of Rama's friendship with Sugriva and if it was so, Bali should restore Sugriva his legitimate rights, she said. She was of the opinion that conflict with Rama should be avoided at all costs, for Rama was as mighty as Indra.

Bali was adamant. Assuring Tara that he would spare Sugriva's life after laying him low, and trusting that Rama would not take an unfair advantage over him, when he was engaged with Sugriva, Bali came out and seized Sugriva. While each tried to overpower the other, Rama's arrow pierced Bali's heart, and there he lay convulsing on the ground.

Rama approached Bali, who now looked like flameless fire. The dying Vanara chief lay like Yayati fallen from Heaven. Bali was polite to Rama and said: "Has your treacherous arrow, O prince, by piercing through my heart, while I was engaged in fight with another, added glory to your fair name? I had expected a better behaviour from you who are known as the paragon of virtue. I feel that you carry your good name only to cover your treacherous deeds. I was a fool not to pay heed to Tara's advice when she warned me against such an under-hand scheme; for like a grass-covered pit, or like a wolf in sheep's garb, or even like a hidden fire, you were not expected to be so dangerous as you have turned out to be. You seem to be a saint, but you violated all codes of a saintly life. Effort for reconciliation, liberality, forgiveness, obedience to Law, truthfulness, self-confidence, chivalry, and even chastising the offenders were the virtues of which kings could be proud. What pride is there in claiming the life of one belonging to the Vanara race, which is content to live on the fruits and herbs growing in the forests? I do not know why a prince belonging to the human race should at all have treated me as an enemy. Men fought only for land, gold and silver. By killing me you have gained nothing, though you have certainly lost your claims to virtues like justice, pro-

priety, authority to punish crime, and kindness. Royal glory implies large-heartedness; but you have only acted capriciously, because you had a claim to archery. Your action will certainly be censured by all lovers of justice. Those who killed creatures without cause are condemned like cowards, thieves, informers, unbelievers and regicides, and like those who kill friends, Brahmanas or the cows, and like those who are guilty of incest with their preceptors' wives. The high-caste people are forbidden to eat flesh of the five-nailed animals, except a tortoise, a porcupine, a godha lizard and a hare. Even the skin, bones and hair of a Vanara are regarded as inauspicious. The earth is not lucky in having you as her lord. Dasharatha was not blessed the day when you were born, for you have without justification killed me who was neither a friend nor a foe. Instead of challenging me to an open fight which should have certainly cost you your life, you have transgressed Dharma and like a snake in the grass, or like an elephant run amuck, you have stolen life out of a noble warrior." All this was said by Bali in his moments of agony.

Equally vehement was Rama's defence of his action. As a king in the line of Ikshvaku, Rāma's authority extended over all creatures on this earth. Rama was moving in these forests as Bharata's deputy to punish all offenders of Dharma. Bali, who had taken possession of the wife and the property of his younger brother, had been rightly punished by the royal authority of an Ikshvaku prince. Rama maintained that it was difficult to decide what was right or wrong on the basis of traditional law, for those who belonged to a tribe of the blind could not see light even when guided by hundreds of blind men like themselves. Those pursuing selfish ends could not know what was truth. The Supreme Being, residing in the heart of every creature, alone knew what was absolute truth. Rama explained to Bali that having pledged help to a sworn friend, there was no other way open to him. Moreover, those who violated the sanctity of social relations to lead a licentious life could not be absolved from their sins unless rightly punished by the king. This was in accordance with what Manu had said in the two well-known verses. Mandhatar, an ancestor of Rama had also punished a hermit for a similar crime. As for shooting at Bali from behind the trees, Rama had absolutely no compunction, for Bali was only a monkey and,

like beasts, could be the target of a hunter's arrow from a point of vantage.

All this convinced the dying Vanara chief that Rama's action was only lawful. He apologised to Rama for the harsh words uttered in sheer ignorance. In Bali's opinion, Rama had indeed a real vision of truth for he was devoted to the welfare of all creatures. He acknowledged that Rama knew what means and ends were conducive to the noble aims of life. Now that truth flashed on Bali, he bowed to Rama and prayed to him to be kind to Angada, who was the only son of Bali and Tara, and who had been so fondly loved by Bali. Rama, whom Bali regarded as powerful as Indra, consoled Bali and assured him that the interests of Angada would be properly looked after.

Bali's wife, Tara, had by this time come to the spot where Bali, the greatest of Vanaras, lay breathing his last. Her cries melted every heart. It was a pity, she said, that the noblest of Vanaras had met such an unbecoming end. She wondered if noble Rama could have done this deed. She would follow Bali to heaven by ending her life, she said. Hanuman consoled her by telling her that all souls were destined to suffer or enjoy according to their actions. Life and death were uncertain. Man was like a bubble of water that could disappear any moment. Tara herself was as much pitiable as Bali who was now dying. Death spared none. The fate of Bali who was once the protector of the hosts of Vanaras, should be a lesson to all who discriminate between good and evil. Tara's first duty now was to look after her son Angada. Bali also implored Sugriva to look after Angada.

Bali's kind words addressed to Sugriva and Angada moved all. Sugriva was moved to tears to hear Bali's affectionate advice. His joy at having won a victory over Bali was now changed to despair for losing a valiant brother. The Vanara chief breathed his last after explaining to Sugriva and Angada their mutual obligations. Kishkindha looked gloomy and every one present was drowned in sorrow. Tara's lamentations rent the still air. Sugriva rued the day when he asked Rama to kill Bali. He should have been content to be a destitute rather than have arranged for Bali's death, he said. Bali had spared Sugriva's life on many occasions. Sugriva felt remorse for committing fratricide, and his sin loomed large like an elephant. He was unwilling to accept the kingship. He declared that he would burn himself alive, charging

Vanaras under Angada's leadership to help Rama. Tara, too, approached Rama, and praising Rama's virtue and matchless might, prayed to him to kill her also with an arrow, for without Bali, she would not live for a moment.

Rama, who was thus addressed by Tara and Sugriva, was equally moved to tears. He reminded them that fate was inexorable and none could be regarded as the absolute author of one's deeds. Time, acting through human nature, was the ordainer of all actions and events. Man was a helpless victim of time who spared none and argued nothing. Workings of time were undecipherable. Rama remarked that Bali was lucky in having led a noble life. The deceased chief should now be properly disposed off. Lakshmana then instructed them in the details of the royal funeral procession. The procession moved to the burning ghat, where amidst shrieks and cries from all quarters, Bali was cremated according to vedic rites.

Sugriva and his counsellors approached Rama to preside over the coronation ceremony of Sugriva. Rama declined to enter Kishkindha, for he had pledged to live in forests for fourteen years. Sugriva was asked to declare Angada as the crown prince. The coronation and the declaration of the crown prince were performed with due pomp. Rama and Lakshmana selected a beautiful cave on the Malaya hills for their sojourn during the rainy season.

Rama was sad on account of his separation from his wife. Lakshmana consoled Rama and reminded him that strong and determined efforts should be made to vanquish Ravana. He believed that Sita was so devoted to Rama and that wherever she might be, her love would be only for Rama. Rama was, however, patient to watch the beauty of the ensuing rains. There was beauty and freshness everywhere making Rama sadder. The rainy season was over, and so was the dewy season. Rama called Lakshmana's attention to Sugriva's promise in tracing Sita. Rama felt that Sugriva had been happy all these months, and he had probably forgotten all about Rama. Lakshmana was also furious. He declared that he would go and kill Sugriva. Rama pacified him and sent him to Kishkindha with the message that Rama's arrow would deal with Sugriva in the same manner as Bali had been dealt with. Lakshmana's fury, as he stood at the gates of Kishkindha, frightened the guards of the city who approached



Sugriva with the news of Lakshmana's displeasure. On Tara's advice and Hanuman's warning, Sugriva, of course, had already sent for hosts of Vanaras to collect at Kishkindha. While waiting for the Vanara host, he was busy in love sports with Tara and Ruma and he did not pay any heed to what the guards conveyed to him.

In the meantime, Sugriva's ministers had guided Lakshmana to Sugriva's palace. Finding Sugriva lost in love sports with Ruma and Tara, Lakshmana called him a faithless person who had forgotten his obligations to those who had helped him in the past. Sugriva was inebriate. His hair and garlands were all dishevelled. He looked blank and confused. Deputing Tara for pacifying Lakshmana, Sugriva retired to make himself ready for a proper reception of Lakshmana. Tara came fresh from the drinking hall, and drops of wine were sparkling on her lips. She walked with unsteady steps. Her eyes were rolling with intoxication of wine and youthful pride. Every movement of her limbs was adding lustre to her graceful height. Her beauty flashed as she spoke in half-uttered syllables. The disciplined Lakshmana had to force his eyes away from her while listening to her eloquent defence of the follies of youth. She remarked that Lakshmana was ignorant of pleasures of reunited lovers. Beauty and youth were ever procrastinating, she said. Sage Vishwamitra, she narrated, had once, in the company of a celestial nymph, spent ten years like a day. She told Lakshmana that he should not have been uncivil to Sugriva without a cause. She informed Lakshmana that Sugriva had already sent for Vanaras to collect at Kishkinda and very soon they would all be despatched to get a clue about Sita. Tara was sure that Sugriva could renounce everything for the sake of Rama. She disclosed statistics that Bali had once told her about Rakshasas' strength. In Lanka, the Rakshasas numbered a hundred thousand crores, while there were thirty-six thousand crores of the Rikshas or the Bears and a hundred crores of cow-tailed Vanaras at Bali's command, besides many crores under his influence. These would soon be in Kishkindha at Rama's command. Tara's eloquence and wisdom made Lakshmana speechless.

Sugriva came and reiterated his loyalty to Rama. In the presence of Lakshmana, Sugriva instructed his ministers and officials to issue orders for all Vanaras settled on the various mountains

of the earth to be present by the tenth day, failing which they would forfeit their lives. Sugriva approached Rama, when hosts of monkeys had already collected in the Pampa forests. These were mighty chiefs who were ready to be commanded by Sugriva. Rama was happy to see all these armies, and embraced Sugriva as a comrade. These Vanaras were ordered to scatter themselves throughout the regions, arranging to find fruits for their units.

These Vanaras were then sent to all the four directions. Leaders of the hosts going to the east, south, west and north were instructed to search every city, forest, hill, valley, lake and cave for tracing Sita. For the south, Angada was the leader of the hosts of mighty Vanaras and Rikshas like Jamabavanta. While others returned from their search without getting any clues of Sita, the only hope lay on Hanuman, who had gone to the south under the command of Angada. This unit searched every forest and mountain. While wandering through a dry region, they were without food and water for many a day. They entered an underground passage and found the forest of Mayasura where Swayam Pratibha entertained them with fruits and honey. As they wanted to come out of the underground cave Swayam Pratibha asked them to close their eyes. They soon found themselves on the seashore, where birds and flowers marking the advance of spring were now visible. Finding they had been without a clue while a month was over, they grew panicky at the thought of courting Sugriva's anger. They chose to die there rather than be punished by Sugriva.

While Angada had so persuaded the Vanaras to plan an escape from Sugriva's punishment, Hanuman addressed Angada in the presence of all. By his eloquence, Hanuman was able to create division in the Vanaras. In his opinion, it was unwise to pursue a plan against Sugriva's wishes, for the senior chiefs like Jambavanta, Nila and Suhotra would not be commanded by Angada and when these would go back, Lakshmana's anger would destroy Angada and his comrades. Hanuman believed Angada to be wise and learned. The only way for them was to explain their failure to Sugriva, who, in Hanuman's opinion, was just and truth-loving. He would forgive them all.

Angada, however, disagreed with Hanuman. He believed that Sugriva was unjust and ill-intentioned, and as he was carrying on

love-sports with Tara, Sugriva could not be called honest. In Angada's opinion, it was only for fear of Lakshmana that Sugriva had sent Vanaras in search of Sita. Angada was afraid that as his secret thoughts were now made public, Sugriva's anger was certain. He was sure that Sugriva would only be too happy to kill him and declare his own unworthy son to be the crown prince. Paying his respects to the elders and asking others to console Tara for the loss of her dear son, Angada, with tears in his eyes, sat for a fast unto death. All the Vanaras were moved to tears and followed his example. While they talked of Rama's exile, Dasharatha's death, Sita's abduction and Bali's death, they were struck with fear of approaching death.

As they sat emaciated at the foot of the hill, a vulture, Sampati by name, who had lived unusually long, saw them. He was happy to find these half-dead Vanaras, whom he would eat day after day. As these Vanaras saw the vulture approaching them, they were terrified. They talked of Jatayu who was lucky to have died for Rama's sake, while they would be condemned to an ignominious death of renegades. Sampati, who was Jatayu's brother, listened to them mentioning his brother's name. He asked them to narrate to him how Jatayu had died for the sake of Rama.

The vulture, whose wings had been burnt down by the Sun's heat was helped by the Vanaras to come down to the ground. They narrated to him all about Jatayu's valiant fight with Ravana. They also told the vulture how they had lost their way in an underground passage and how they were afraid of going back to Kishkindha without any information about Sita. Sampati was anxious to avenge his brother's death, and wished Ravana to be killed by Rama. He had not heard of Jatayu since the flight to the Sun was undertaken by Sampati and Jatayu. It was when Vritrasura was killed by Indra. Sampati had been a witness of the war between the Devas and the Asuras and of the Churning of the Ocean. He knew the worlds under the Ocean and also beyond the Sun, under Varuna. He recalled that he had heard the cries of a young lady, beautifully dressed and ornamented, whom Ravana was carrying. She was making desperate efforts to get rid of the Rakshasa. Sampati was sure that the lady was Sita, for she was calling upon Rama and Lakshmana. As a vulture, he could see at a distance of a hundred yojanas. He told the Vanaras that one of them, who was capable of a flight to

Lanka, should go there and comfort Sita, now sitting in an orchard at Lanka. He described to them the passage through the sky which different birds followed.

The vulture told them how his son Suparshva had also seen Ravana and Sita flying over the sea. Suparshva was then waiting for some prey for his old, crippled father Sampati. Suparshva should have killed Ravana and Sita for his meals without knowing who they were, had not Ravana humbly begged Suparshva to spare them. Siddhas or space-beings had then appeared to Suparshva and told him that he had done well to spare Ravana, for Ravana would be killed by Rama. The same had been predicted by the sage Nishakara who once lived on the Vindhya range by the side of the sea. It was near the sage's Ashrama that Sampati had fallen after his wings had been burnt by the Sun. Recovering his consciousness, Sampati had gone to see the sage Nishakara, who had known Sampati and Jatayu. The sage was moved to see the king of vultures in that burnt condition. Sampati narrated to the sage how he and Jatayu had undertaken a flight to the Sun, and how Sampati in his efforts to save Jatayu from the heat of the Sun, had burnt himself carelessly in falling along the path of the air. The sage consoled Sampati and told him how Rama would be born and Sita would be born, and Sita would be carried away by Ravana and how Sampati would recover his wings and strength when Vanaras in search of Sita would come to this place. Sampati had been waiting for the present day for all these hundred years. The sage had wished to see Rama, but he could not live long.

As Sampati narrated all this, the Vanaras were happy to see that Sampati's wings were growing anew. Sampati fluttered and was able to fly. This confirmed all that had been foretold by the sage.

The Vanaras moved to the sea-coast and were discussing among themselves how to jump over the ocean. Every chief estimated his own strength. Mainda, Nala, Nila, Sushena, Dvidida and Jambavanta, all could go only less than a hundred yojanas over the sea. Angada could go a hundred yojanas but could not come back. Still he offered to jump, but Jambavanta did not like their prince to do the job himself, when there were others to do it.

Hanuman all this while had been watching these warriors quietly. On being adored by Jambavanta through the story of



Hanuman's birth, Hanuman felt inspired, and grew bold. Jambavanta narrated how Hanuman's mother, Anjani, who was a beautiful lady, had conceived Hanuman through the god Vayu. As soon as he was born, Hanuman in his attempt to catch the Sun, had jumped to the skies for three hundred yojanas, when Indra hurled a thunderbolt at him, and hurt his chin. While god Vayu stopped all winds from blowing, gods appeared to bless Hanuman with long life and matchless strength.

As Jambavanta narrated this incident, Hanuman was inspired to feel equal to the task. He grew large in every one's eyes and declared his great might. He would jump over Mandara and fly above the sea higher than all birds, he said. He was the son of Wind and could perform deeds like his father, he claimed. He could fly over a thousand miles without rest. He was quite confident of his physical strength and hoped to see Sita, or if needed, even to ransack Lanka. All this, Hanuman said to the Vanaras, who were all happy to see him take a jump from the Mandara mountain.

## II

### MANU ON DHARMA

Kishkindha is the poet's relaxation after the climax-event. The poet, like his hero, had been under a great trial in the Aranya Kanda. It was only so well designed by him to relax a little before engaging himself in the pressing theme ahead of him. The Creator and the gods like Indra had also long strained themselves in steering the hero's life through his struggles. The poet and the hero had by now located their goals. It was now a straight run to the great event, namely, Ravana's death, and while the hero gauged, adjusted and collected his strength to combat the most formidable of the enemies of man, the poet provided an interlude for his readers in the events of the Kishkindha Kanda.

The land which the hero visited to meet Sugriva had its own problems. Mistrust and jealousy between the two brothers, Bali and Sugriva, were gathering momentum to enact a tragedy, the like of which had been averted at Ayodhya through the goodwill between the two brothers Rama and Bharata. Had it been otherwise at Ayodhya, a family of Ikshvaku would have similarly witnessed a bloody murder of a brother at the hands of the other, or perhaps Ayodhya, like Kishkindha, might have invited warriors from abroad to help one brother against another. In the intense moment of a tragic situation of Bali's death, the poet glorifies by contrast, the great ideals of the land of Manu that had saved the Aryans from internecine warfare and in times of such crises had directed the Aryan heroes to seek fresh fortunes away from the place of dispute and to work for the establishment of Dharma in which renunciation of rights at home, was well compensated by extension of rule of law in other lands.

It was this rule of Law that was established by Rama among the people of Kishkindha. The Vanara-race was learning much, when after a brief exposition of Dharma by Rama, its dying chief Bali, whom Rama had shot from a point of vantage,

apologized to Rama for not having recognized in him a pillar of Dharma and protector of humanity. Whatever the understanding of the Law of Manu Bali could be proud of, there was much in Manu's Law of Dharma that a descendant of Manu could teach the Vanara chief. Bali had many meritorious deeds to his credit. He had been offering the three daily vedic prayers, and had maintained his honour as a warrior-chief in all his actions, but he had not cared to respect the rights of others. This was what only a hero of the family of Ikshvaku could impress upon Bali, who in his dying moments called upon his beloved wife, brother, and his comrades to respect what Rama declared as the Manu's Law of human-fellowship.

That in the Kishkindha Kandam, the poet records how in ancient days, the Law of Manu had its hold on the non-Aryan races, is clear from the spirit of discussion between Bali and Rama. Every word in that discussion recalls the tenets of Manu Smriti. Bali was well-conversant with the Law of Manu, and though he seemed to have failed to act according to the true spirit of these laws, he could startle Rama by quoting Manu's code for levelling against Rama a charge of self-willed behaviour.

Bali reminded Rama that Dharma, Artha and Kama, or virtue, acquisition and pleasure were the motives which determined a king's actions according to the Law of Manu (Manu, II, 27), but in Bali's opinion, Dasharatha's son had gone astray from Manu's concept of virtue by killing Bali in a cowardly manner, when he was not to gain some land, gold or silver by this cruel act. Bali pointed out that Rama's unworthy action was only a self-willed choice of pleasure, for any interference in Kishkindha's domestic quarrel was uncalled for according to Manu's Raja Dharma, which taught the stronger Aryans not to interfere in the internal affairs of the weaker states. Bali's term 'Udasin' used for himself as one who was neither a friend nor a foe, was exactly what Manu Smriti used for a non-aligned state (Manu VII, 158). In this dialogue between Bali and Rama, Valmiki seems to be proud of evaluating Manu's Law through the judgements of a non-Aryan. In Rama's refutation of Bali's charges, the poet again quotes the text of two verses from Manu, when Rama declares that a criminal was absolved from sins when punished by a king, while otherwise the sins of a criminal unpunished by law were

acquired by the king himself. These verses (Manu VII 39-42) are available today in the Manu Smriti in the form we find them reproduced in the *Ramayana*.

Though Valmiki had been proclaiming different aspects of Manu's Raja Dharma in every book of the *Ramayana*, it is in the Kishkindha Kanda that we find him directly speaking of the Laws of Manu. This was not because he was displaying his knowledge of the code of Dharma, but because he took upon himself to render for the first time in the people's Sanskrit what might have been current only in some older form of language akin to the vedic. As the writer of the first epic of the Aryan race, he was recording a series of adventures which the Aryans had been making to enlighten mankind.

That the gospel of Dharma and the well-disciplined character of the royal-sages in the line of Manu and Ikshvaku which this gospel had created had ever impressed the chiefs among the barbarian people is evident from Bali's reference even to the hunting-sports and dietary law of the enlightened Aryans in his quotation of the code of Manu, forbidding the Aryans the eating of the flesh of the five-nailed creatures (Manu V. 17). The *Ramayana* records here the force of conviction and the appeal of justice with which the Aryan civilisation was spreading through distant regions and peoples, where barbaric glamour of life was sought through strong-headed pursuit of pleasure and self-willed fulfilment of wishes, even through merciless infliction on the people. Bali, though the noblest of chiefs among such peoples, was acting only like a barbarian in his treatment of Sugriva.

Surprisingly enough, the poet also gives us here a strange glimpse of the doctrine, which, later on in the Gita was given a fuller exposition as the philosophy of Karma Yoga. We can visualise here the significance of Lord Krishna's statement in the Gita (4, 1-2), that Manu, his son Ikshvaku, and the royal sages in their line, were among the earliest enlightened teachers of humanity who by the manner of their living propagated the divine wisdom of the Karma Yoga, revealed to Manu in the dawn of human civilisation. Bali's recounting of virtues which a king was expected to cultivate, and Rama's mention of Reason and Yoga or Atma Vidya in this dialogue as compulsory attainments in the pursuit of the virtuous life as enjoined by Manu (VII, 44), are a fore-shadow of the most inspiring chapters in Lord Krishna's



discourse in the battlefield of Mahabharata. These virtues, disciplines and wisdom, emphasized here as attainments of the royal family of Ikshvaku, were declared as equipments of the Karma Yoga to which Arjuna was being initiated by Lord Krishna in the Gita. Valmiki directly mentions Manu as the first authority to commend all these disciplines like self-control, tranquillity or absence of passion, forgiveness, Dharma or realisation of one's duty towards maintenance of righteousness, steadfastness, truthfulness, courageous action, conciliation, charity, justice and humility as the attainments of a king.

We find, here, in the Kishkindha Kanda another fore-runner to the Karma Yoga philosophy of the Gita. Hanuman's deep understanding of the 'Vairagya', or the spirit of detachment and renunciation in accepting challenges of life, marks every word of his advice to Tara in the moment of the tragic upheaval in the tribe. The theory of Karma and the concept of the reward after death are so well argued here for the first time in the poetry of the post-vedic ages. Evidently, Hanuman had realised and owned this philosophy of life, and had impressed Rama for attainments in these spheres of thought. Rama's final refutation of Bali's accusation of Rama's shooting at Bali, instead of boldly calling on him for a fight, is, in a way, the earliest instance on record of a behaviour of a hero acting upto the immaculate traditions of Karma Yoga in the family of Ikshvaku. Like Lord Krishna declaring in the Gita (4. 17) that as it was rather hard for a man to understand the impact and momentum of an action, every man was not competent to judge what action was absolutely right to be performed and what was absolutely wrong to be avoided, Rama, too, declares here that it was not possible for every man to assess the merit of an indispensable strategy of an action performed by a virtuous king dedicated to the rule of Dharma.

All this here, is, what, indeed, could be described as the nucleus of the philosophy of Karma Yoga of the Gita. Valmiki's hero was performing actions as the supreme Karma Yogi in the line of Manu to whom the ever-abiding knowledge of Karma Yoga had been revealed. A similar role of a Karma Yogi was to be played by Hanuman after his devout association with Rama, by whom Hanuman was accepted as a counsellor for his knowledge of the three vedas and the schools of philosophy, for such indeed were

the qualifications prescribed by Manu for a worthy counsellor of a king.

It was an awkward moment in Rama's life. His wife had been kidnapped and he was moving forlorn in search of an ally. While inspiration might have completely forsaken a poet in the most trying moments of the hero's life, Valmiki sustains an interest in his poem by an exposition of the great wisdom from the past.

All this was done with commendable charm. The spectacular scene of a crowd around Bali's corpse is not without a dramatic effect. In Tara's pungent irony in her remarks about Rama's deed, we may recall Mark Antony's speech against noble Brutus in *Julius Caesar*. The poet also keeps amusing the readers with a tale from afar, as it were, for such was the story of the fugitive Vanara prince who finally regains his kingship. There is a bloody duel and a tragic death with a gloomy funeral, followed by a happy reunion of husband and wife, and a revelry in which drinking bouts drown all past sufferings. There is an exotic gleam of romance in the graceful charmer Tara, whose wisdom and beauty dazzle high-minded Lakshmana. The sparkling drops of wine on her lips release the reader from a long strain of watching a set of characters too exalted for indulgence in such youthful follies. This side-plot contrasts with the main plot in many respects, and is well-knit with the main theme. As soon as Sugriva has had enough of amusement in the love-sports, there is the comet appearance of Lakshmana before him. Soon, preparations are afoot for tracing Sita, and the poet gives a bird's-eye view of the whole hemisphere over which searching eyes earnestly look out for the heroine of the main story.

There is no justice in ascribing all great learning in India to the dynamics of a revival-complex in the nation after Buddhism. The flowering season of the great vedic age did not close with the serious literature like the Brahmanas and the Dharma-Sutras. The softer notes in the chorus of the morning chant of the Aryan race were played by the epics out of which the *Ramayana* touched the deeper strain.

Manu Smriti and the *Ramayana*, for their mutual relations, evidently belong to the same period of the national awakening. The depth of his moral tone and a poetic appreciation of a Divine will in the working of nobler men are akin to Manu's comprehension of Dharma. Mention of Manu as the first Law-giver

through all the literature of ancient India makes it quite possible that Manu Smriti had existed in oral tradition from the earliest vedic days. The great epics poetised some of its tenets, especially those dealing with a king's obligations to his people and the people's obligations to society. When the Smriti assumed its present form through the hands of a poet, these were adopted for the present version of the Law-book. This explains the existence of the two verses of Manu in the *Ramayana*. Such concurrences of the text in the epics as well as the Smriti itself helped to popularise the poetised version of the Law-book as we find it today and raised its status above other versions of it that might have existed in some Sutra-form or even in the vedic prose similar to the Brahmanas. Portions of Vishnu Smriti still exist in Sutra-form, though sections of it have been versified.

### III

## LYRICAL POETRY

There is some fine lyrical poetry in this book of the *Ramayana*. Advent of spring is beautifully described in the opening canto. Clear lakes, fragrant flowers, blooming stalks and soothing breezes are mentioned here as in the poetry of every country and every age. Conceits in ideas and figurative language, too are met here as elsewhere. Valmiki, who can be a match for any poet in his freshness and originality of these conceits and figures, remains unsurpassed in his capacity to bring home to the reader the feelings of a forlorn lover. Every bird draws the lover's attention to the strain of joy running through nature in the happy season. Nature embodies a soul in kinship with the human soul. Even the rustling trees, with bees capping over their buds, look like youthful musicians practising their musical recitations. The lover's absence from the beloved is all the more painful, when every bird and every animal moves in close company with its mate and every creeper is entwining itself round a tree. Rapture of spring is marked in every line.

"Scattered below, falling through air, or hanging still on their stalks

Flowers behold O, Lakshmana, all provide a sport for the wind.

"Rendering apart branches of many a large tree laden with fruits,

Wind from the shaken sports carries in its trail music from the bees,

"To the tune of rapt cuckoo's melodies, teaching the saplings of dance,

Gushes out of mountain-clefts, wind, in strains of musical notes.

"With tops wrapped in flowers, restless with strokes of wind



## LYRICAL POETRY

With bees as their caps, aloud sing these youthful trees."  
This happy mood in nature is in sad contrast with the lover's mind.

"This spring, O son of Sumitra, loud with songs of many a bird

In me, when Sita is not here, enkindles only flames of sorrow."

And,

"When I am so sorrow-stricken, tortured by the god of Love  
To his happy and boisterous notes, cuckoo draws my attention."

"Revelling in the lovely forest springs, water-fowl torments me

Who is love-stricken; and with its joyous notes makes me sadder still.

"Hearing its love-cry, my beloved — ah, then she was dwelling here —

Lovingly called me to hear, and was transported with joy,  
"Many female birds with their mates in love-sports cry with joy.

As happy drones, O son of Sumitra, whirl with sweetest notes."

And,

"These rustling trees kindle in me, as it were, flames of love  
Through Ashoka stalks, reddening as embers, hissing with noise of bees."

And,

"The spring, with leaves glowing as flames consumes me;  
sparing her

Who has pointing eye-lashes, lovely hair and sweet accents."

And,

"Her sight denied, son of Sumitra, purposeless is life  
This season is so dear to her, when forests so lovely are."

And,

"Haply spring has reached the land, where sojourns my love.  
Forlorn is Sita indeed, she too is sorrow-stricken."

And,

"Oh that spring visit not the land where she lives,  
How shall the blue-lotus-eyed fare there without me!"

And,

"Lotus-eyed and sweet-natured, my love shall,  
Surely renounce life, if spring be there."

And,

"Sita that loves virtue, O where is she now,  
Bereft of her, how selfish, Lakshmana, if I live."

Sensual tone of later Sanskrit poetry is, however, altogether absent here. Still there is all the poetic charm that could be found anywhere else. Suggestion is the keynote of this season of youthful frolics. A noble restraint marks every expression of the sentiment of love, the Shringara Rasa, as they call it. What affectionate hopes link the separated lovers in the lover's wishes that spring touch not the land where she lives; and in the faith that if his life without her has no purpose, she, too, must be finding it hard to carry on the burdensome life without her lover. The reminiscences of fond love on both sides are awakened by the cuckoo's happy notes, and the water-fowls' love-cry which had transported the beloved so often to joy, when she watched them in the company of her lover. This is where the intellectual tone of the Book is kept suspended.

Once again, when after summer, rains disturb Rama's heart and he finds that no progress has been made towards rescuing of Sita, Nature assumes as dark a vesture as Rama's despondent mind.

"Dark with clouds, the sky, stars and the Sun unseen,  
drowned is earth.

Under fresh rain water, the quarters are bereft of light."

This presence of a living heart in Nature cannot fail to remind us of Wordsworth. Yet, where the English poet sees simplicity, innocence and strength of rustics in Nature, Valmiki finds Nature equally in sympathy with the highest civilised society.

"Stayed is marching of kings, troops retreat,

Highways close, Saryu roars in spite

The high peaks, like kings to be anointed, when winds from  
Indra bring

Cloud-fuls of water to wash them, towering gracefully,  
stand."

In Valmiki there is all the relish that one may find in poems like Shelley's "Cloud".

"The time is come, when rains set in,

## LYRICAL POETRY

Lo, sky is covered with rock-like clouds,  
Through Sun's rays, pregnant with essence of the seas,  
The sky, after nine months delivers panacea as her child."

Conceits here are worthy of a warrior's reflection. The luxuriant beauty of an indulgent imagination forestalls the latter chivalric ages.

"In dusky copper light, flashing high  
Where whiter patches appear  
Of moist clouds, the sky on its wound  
A bandage doth seem to wear"

And,

"With breeze as its gentle breath  
And twilight as the sandal-paste  
Where patch of a grey-cloud appears  
Love-sick looks the azure sky."

Yet purity of conception in the ideas fails not to bring to our imagination the age of the *Ramayana*, when highest inspiration came from the field of spiritual cultivation.

"Wrapped in deerskin of the darkening clouds,  
And water-spouts running as their sacred threads  
Having caves resounding with the breeze,  
Initiated for sacred rites the mountains stand."

The figures are equally fresh, when these are drawn from the lover's recollections of his beloved.

"Arrested in dark clouds,  
Flashing lightning does appear  
As restless as in Ravana's arm  
Is Videha's daughter austere."

And,

"Having long suffered from heat  
And now drenched with showers  
Like Sita sorrow-stricken,  
The Earth overflows in tears."

Even without these concepts and metaphors, the rainy season is beautiful and refreshing.

"Blowing through the clouds,  
Cool and comforting as lotus-leaves,  
Fit to be drunk in handfuls,  
Is air odorous with ketaki scent."

With all these joys in nature, lover's pangs of sorrow are genuine. Lakshmana is touched to see Rama so much lost in recollections of Sita. Seasons are changing fast and gloomy moods would not stick to man. Rama, who was envious of the love-sports of birds and animals, and who was marking every change in the face of beautiful nature with a feeling of destitution, is reminded of his self-control, when the radiant dews sparkle all round. Lakshmana advises Rama to recover from his weakness.

"Which neither helps concentration of mind

Nor prepares a man for right action."

The dewy season marks the close of the rainy season. In India, the dews were celebrated with laying out of large-scale sacrifices. Ambitious kings performed the Ashvamedha or the Horse sacrifice and sent their generals to establish their sovereignty in the neighbouring states.

Imagery in this description of the dewy season, or Autumn is replete with such associations. It is the time when roads are dry for armies to march.

"Mud is dried by the maturing sun's rays,

Once again sticky dust arises over the plains,

Hostile kings to be ready for war, welcome the coming

Hostile kings, ready for war, welcome the coming"

And,

"Cloudless is the sky, flashing like a whetted sword,

Breezes are cool as lotus,

Released from darkness the quarters shine."

Not only is man recovering from his love-sickness. Even animals are feeling a challenge to win laurels in the bracing season of the dews.

"Dews enhancing their beauty of form,

Merrily coating with dust their limbs,

Excited and lusty for a fight

Bulls are lowing amidst the cows."

Those who are peace-loving and can appreciate higher values of contemplative life of knowledge and renunciation, may equally draw inspiration from Nature, when even birds are making an effort for purer contemplative moods.

"Finding skies all cloudless,

They cast bright plumes in groves



## LYRICAL POETRY

Not much attached to their mates,  
Peacocks now contemplation seek."

Thus nature as a comrade inspires man even for noblest undertakings impressing him all the time with her beauty in every form.

"Streams in the dewy season, receding gradually show their banks,

As new to an audience, shyly, dancers display their thighs."  
And,

"On branches of saptachada trees extensive,  
Brightening under the stars, the sun and the moon,  
For the sports of the mighty elephants  
Scattering its beauty, the dewy season begins."

And,

"Night, as the moon rises, is sweet-faced,  
Her eyes flash with the twinkling stars,  
Dressed with moonshine, she comes  
A radiant lady in robes so white."

No study of Valmiki's lyrical poetry would be complete without a note on his description of the sea in the 'Yuddha Kandam'. Sea poetry is not absent in Indian literature. In Valmiki's few verses, when Rama's armies encamped on the seashore, we have a specimen of force that is akin to the fury of the elements. The description is realistic and poetry closes the wings of imagination to look below at the mighty upsurging ocean that opens on all sides to meet the sky. Sight of the sea which is 'the sky stretched below' is indeed surprising to the hero whose visions encompassed both the worlds.

"Shaken by violent winds, by alligators and whales,  
Rich in sports is the sea as is the world of snakes,  
Frowning, fierce and unfathomed sea  
Where Asuras resort, sparkling  
As molten fire, and python-like,  
The sea was sky, the sky was sea, indeed,  
It was all one, where met the twain."

In *Ramayana*, the epic poetry has covered Nature including the sea and the sky. In *Sundara Kandam*, space above was as much the expanse of beauty for Valmiki's Muse, as the fields and mountains in other sections of the epic.

#### IV

### GEOGRAPHICAL AND POLITICAL MAPS

Another striking feature of Kishkindha Kādam is the description of the geographical and political conditions of the old world of those days. Valmiki's descriptions are graphic and are a literary version of a relief map of the land including a Batheographical study of seas, as it were. Besides rivers and mountains of India and the adjacent territories, boulders and hills over the sea have been described at length. The idiom in the *Ramayana* is more realistic than in any other work of those early days.

Valmiki, who elsewhere has given weight to the historical aspect of the legend of the three strides of Vishnu, and has so often mentioned the Dwarf incarnation of Vishnu, interprets here traditions of the geographical studies in the old legend as faultlessly as a realist. Sun as the Purushottama, or the Supreme Spirit, is Vishnu whose three steps cover the whole universe. These steps are, rising in the far east, setting in the far west, and the journey across the other side of the globe, not along the equator, but with an upward inclination towards the north, round the northern region in the Jambudvīpa, as the poet calls it.

"There in the east, planting his first step, Vishnu of the three strides

The second on the Meru top, the Supreme Spirit did set;  
By the third having gone round the Jambudvīpa, the Sun  
Is visible once again on the glorious mount." (*Ramayana*  
4, 40, 59).

To this popular version of the earth's rotation round the Sun, the scientific version is as well added later in cantos 65 where Jambavanta claims to have circumambulated the Sun, while Vishnu took the strides. The poet's geographical sense is clearly marked in the description of the earth spinning like a torch with a marked depression or "the cow-hoof print" on the north pole.

## GEOGRAPHICAL AND POLITICAL MAPS

"Its surface like a mirror here the earth by me  
Rotating as a burning torch,  
Was seen to have the cow-hoofs print." (R. 4, 46, 13).

The same was the observation of Sampati who described earth's motion as "different towns rotating like points."

This new interpretation of the old legend of the vedic hymns is only a prelude to a more thorough description of the rising and the setting mountains standing in the Jaloda ocean and Varunalaya ocean respectively. In the eastern region, as Valmiki tells us, there are many islands and mountains beyond the 'Yava or the Java-island' which are a federation of seven states. The mount of the rising sun may be seen thirteen yojanas away towards north in the deep ocean beyond the Kshiroda sea. Beyond that, in the inaccessible region of the mermaids and other sea-creatures, is the Ananta or infinity, standing like a thousand-headed snake. Valmiki categorically mentions this mount as the last point in the east, or in a way, he calls it the zero point on the east. If this were on the 180 degree east longitude, coincident with some islands like the Aleutian, the sunset may, then, be somewhere on the zero longitude near Atlas along the north Africa coast. This mount of the setting sun is called Meru, which stands high above the sixty thousand 'giris' or mountains in the Varunalaya ocean, or the Resort of Varuna. The numerous offshore Canaries Islands beyond Africa might, in those days, have been much above the sea-level to earn the name of 'giris'; or indeed as any geographer should do, Valmiki defines islands as hills standing above the sea.

This was the western limit of the old world. It was on this golden mount, or the mountain of the setting sun that Vishnu's wheel slew the panch-janas or the five people. These panch-janas were probably a federation of some five countries which after resisting long the march of civilisation must have finally accepted the values in the Aryan civilisation. These five people, as mentioned variously in the Mahabharata or collectively in the Markandeya Purana were the Dhumras, the Kalakas, Daurhridas, the Moryas and the Kaikeyas. Some pre-historic links between the European and the Indian Aryans is indeed given here in the reference to the Mount Meghavana.

On Meghavana, a mountain on the way to Meru, Indra was first crowned as the chief of gods. This strange piece of information

approaches the old belief in the West that gods and Muses lived on the Mount Parnassus, the seat of the thunder-wielding Jove.

In the South, Valmiki mentions a region, where every new phase of the moon brings down rains. Evidently, the poet is familiar with Dol-drums, where it is heavily raining throughout the year. Far in the south, beyond Lanka and other islands is the land of the dead which is covered with an eternal mist. This is very clearly the Antarctic region. In the farthest north, Valmiki describes a region where it remains bright even after the sunset. This is, no doubt, the polar region beyond all the mountains in the North. These descriptions are a credit to Valmiki's knowledge of geography.

Valmiki gives a detailed account of the political states of India and its neighbouring countries. There were a number of peoples settled on the banks of Narmada, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri. Mekala, Utkala, Dashama, Avanti, Vidharbha, Rishika, Andhra, Pundra, Chola, Pandya and Kerala were the peoples in the south in the Dandaka forests or around them. In the eastern region were Bhagirathi, Sarayu, Kaushiki, Kalindi, Yamuna, Yamuna mountain, Saraswati, Sindhu, Shona of crystal water, Mahi and Kalamahi with mountain between them, the Mahagramas or the great countrysides like the Brahmagosalas, the Videhas, the Pundras, and the Vangas settled on these rivers.

In the western region were the Saurashtras, the Balhikas, the Saraus, and the land of the stalwart people who protect their fruit estates, the Delta region where the Sindhu meets the sea, Avanti, Angalepa and the other great states in that direction. In the north were Mlecchas, probably the people mentioned as Malukas by Milton in his *Paradise Lost*. Then there were the Pulindas, the Shurasenas, the Prasthalas, the Bharatas, the Kurus, Madrakas, the Kambojas, the Yavanas, the Balhikas, the Rishikas, the Pauravas, the Tankas, the Chinas, the great Chinas, the Niharas, the Kuverapura in the region of Himalayas, the pass beyond the Kronchas mountain and the Uttara Kurus.

The political shape of the sub-continent and its neighbouring countries, as given by Valmiki, speaks of the Indians' wide contacts with other people in very remote times of which the *Ramayana* is the poetic record. Throughout the sub-continent, the states were known by the people of the region and as



mentioned in the *Ramayana* must have been in existence earlier than any historical dynasties known by these names.

The mention of the Mahagramas or the great country sides in the North is equally a very important political feature of the country in the *Ramayana*. Large areas, since remotest times, were peacefully carrying on their independent existence without any desire to add to the glory of their chief by waging wars against their neighbours. The glorious reign of Dasharatha was a product of the age, and the warm reception to Rama given by all peoples confirms the existence of such peaceful relations between the various peoples of the country.

The Uttara Kurus mentioned in the North especially deserve our attention. This region in the Sanskrit literature is usually mentioned as the blessed land of the poet's dreams. In the *Ramayana*, description of the Uttara Kurus is realistic enough and speaks of a very early age of the *Ramayana* when the Uttara Kurus were not looked upon as a mythical people. There in the Himalayas, in the region of the lake, where the sun and the moon are not visible, where shines no star, where there is no thunder, the region is bright with its own light. This region is the resort of those good persons who have realised the aim of their spiritual pursuits.

"Beyond this region is the Shiloda stream, on both sides of which grow strong and thick bamboos. By the help of these bamboos, the saintly persons of the region go across the stream and come back. Across the stream are the Uttar Kurus, a highly cultured and noble people. Waters there abound in golden lotuses. Thousands of rivulets there are rich in blue lotuses. The red and golden lotuses in the region make the ponds look rosy. Costly saffrons with golden coloured filaments impart to the lakes the colour of sunrise. The banks of the streams are covered with countless heaps of precious stones. The mountains are rich in varieties of gems. Fine are the odours, touches and tastes that are to be met here. These mountains are known for production of rich varieties of cloth and of ornaments made of pearls and sapphires. Men and women relish the tastes of fruits growing in abundance through all seasons. Costly bed-covers worked with gold and artistic carpets are the produce of these mountains. Other trees grow flowers for garlands. Costly are drinks and food-stuffs growing here. The women-folk are highly cultured, young

and beautiful. Gandharvas, Siddhas, Kinnaras, Nagas and Vidydharas, are the glorious people who move about here with their ladies. All are skilful and given to luxury, enjoying with their beloveds. vocal and instrumental music. Boisterous laughter is always heard there marking the happiness of people. None is unhappy and none is addicted to evil. Day after day is witnessed the increase in the pleasures and charms of the land." This is evidently the land of Kashmir which literally means self-shining. Pleasure, skilful labour, rich honey, fragrant flowers, saffron, embroidered silk, rich carpets and precious gems make the beautiful valley veritably a paradise on earth.

## V

### ASTRONOMY AND OTHER LORES

For a critic familiar with the Indian concept of art, the epics are, indeed, a sincere record of a long national awakening that had produced, as one harvest, the variety of literature comprising the Brahmanas, the Upanishads and the Dharma Sutras. The Birth of Kartikeya, an original myth in the Bala Kandam of the *Ramayana*, can serve as a clue to the age of the *Ramayana* episode. The poet has attached great auspiciousness to the myth and has given a high place of worship to Kartikeya amongst gods worshipped on the eve of Rama's departure to the forest. All this brings the *Ramayana* age nearer to the age of Shatapatha Brahmana where Kritika, the constellation, marked the vernal equinox. A passage in the Shatapatha Brahmana states that Kritikas did not move from the eastern quarter at that time. The year starting with the Kritikas was the basis of the myth where probably the confusion in calculating the calendar before the adjustment of the equinox with that constellation, was magnified as an Asura over which the newly fixed beginning of the year was a victory of the gods. This is celebrated as a myth, where Kartikeya was born, when Shiva and Parvati as symbol of the Sun and the earth were married. This position of the Kritikas at the vernal equinox, calculated on the basis of the precession of equinox, must have taken place before the third millennium B.C. That this is the age of the *Ramayana* episode is confirmed from the astronomical references in the Yuddha Kandam. Rama's flight back to Ayodhya on the fifth lunar day in Chaitra is associated with the expiry of the constellation Punarvasu and the beginning of Pushya. The poet is particular in mentioning the lunar dates during the days of the battle. On Chaturdashi, or the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the Chaitra month, was Indrajit killed, and Amavasya was the day when the fight between Rama and Ravana ensued. The fifth bright day of Chaitra is mentioned next in right

sequence. The constellation on the fifth bright day of Chaitra today is Mrigashira which precedes by two days the Nakshatra mentioned in the *Ramayana*. This position and the Kritikas at the vernal equinox, calculated on the basis of the precession of equinox, must have taken place much before the third millennium B.C.

It will not be out of place to recapitulate here a few references from the *Ramayana* to show that India had made sufficient advance in Astromony before the Syrians or the Greeks could contribute anything at all to her knowledge in this subject. Some scholars' contention that except for the names of Nakshtras, there was nothing to the credit of the vedic age in this branch of knowledge, looks baseless to a keen student of the *Ramayana*, which as we saw in the chapter 'Veda Sammiti' had followed the vedic traditions in references like those to the Magha and Arjuna or Falguni Nakshatras in connection with Rama's marriage. Every undertaking in the *Ramayana* was similarly commenced on the days of auspicious Nakshatras. Rama's proposed coronation was to be celebrated on the Pushya day. (*Ramayana* II 4, 16-22). The thatched cottage was constructed by Lakshmana on a day when the Nakshatra was auspicious by its association with the Saumya Muhurta and a Dhruva Yoga (II 56, 25). This mass scale popularity of the Nakshatras was indeed due to a more intensive study of the effects of Nakshatras on individual and racial life by native astrologers. Such a study could not be independent of other factors in astrology. Positions of the planets and the zodiacal signs for instance, had to be taken into consideration in studying the effect on a Nakshatra governing an individual or a community. Dasharatha had been fore-alarmed by astrologers about an expected crisis on the eve of Rama's proposed coronation. This was, as Dasharatha told Rama a day before the crisis, on the basis of the evil conjunction of Sun, Mars and Rahu with the native Nakshatra of Dasharatha (R. II, 4, 16, 22). In another reference, Vishakha, the Nakshatra of the Ikshvaku community, was well aspected on the day of Rama's march against Lanka, while Mula, the Nakshatra governing the Rakshasa race was in evil conjunction with planets on the same day. This was what Rama told Sugriva (R. VI 4, 56-57). This piece of an astrological information in a poem is an index of the faith that the masses had developed in the effectiveness of the native system. This



faith, again, should have been based on the correctness of the calculations done by the native astrologers. The astrological chart for the time of Rama's birth includes Nakshatra as well as the zodiacal signs of the planets. Rama was born in the zodiacal sign of Karkataka or cancer, when the Moon was in conjunction with Aditi or the Punarvasu Nakshatra. The five planets, evidently the Sun, Mars, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn, were in their exalted positions, while the Moon was in conjunction with Jupiter. This was on the ninth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra. Bharata was born the next morning. When Lakshmana and Shatrughna were born, the Sun was in cancer, or in other words, the twin brothers were born four months later. Otherwise, we have to translate the locative case of Ravi as indicating the day of birth as Sunday and in that case Lakshmana's birth was in the cancer sign instead of the month denoted by cancer or the month of Shravana (I-18, 9-15).

These details are quite exhaustive for any system of astrology, and especially for the Indian system. The poet does not mention the sixth planet, for Mercury could not be in exaltation at a time when the Sun was in Mesha or Aries.

This extensive knowledge was the result of direct observation and calculations. Valmiki mentions some movements of the stars in the sky as beautiful phenomena. In mentioning Vishakha as auspicious for Rama's march, he had observed that Trishanku and Vishvamitra, two stars in the polar bear were clear on the day (VI 4-50-57). This observation of Trishanku and Vishvamitra is purely an aspect of Indian astronomy, for the sage Vishvamitra had been associated with the discovery of these two stars. Some of these starry clusters had appealed to the aesthetic sense of the poet. Thus, Lakshmana and Shatrughna, followed Rama and Bharata as Purva Bhadrapada follows Uttara Bhadrapada (I 18, 157). Sita in Rama's company was like the moon in Chitra (II, 16, 10). The moon in Chitra is next to the moon in Rohini, nearest to the mid-heaven in India and the poet's observations of day to day movements of the planets and stars had awakened in him associations of youthful pride and beauty in the Chitra moon. Another beautiful feature of the sky is the movement of the constellations round the Pole Star in the Northern latitudes. The poet remarks that flowers scattered by Sita encircled Ravana as

starry clusters encircled the polar mountain Sumeru (R. III, 52, 30).

To the poet's mind, all planets were a limitation to man's free endeavours. Some of his similes are evidently from this psychological reaction. Thus, Dasharatha on the day of Rama's exile was as gloomy as the full moon under the gloomy planet—Rahu (II, 40, 30).

Hanuman entered the mouth of Sinhika, the sea-monster, as the full moon enters Rahu (V 1, 92). Stronger reactions against planets are marked in some other observations. Khara surrounded by Rakshasas was like Mars surrounded by constellations (III, 52, 30). Ravana seized Sita as Mercury seizes Rohini (III 49, 16). Atikaya's face was like the moon conjoined with Punarvasu (VI 71, 24). Atikaya's banner had the insignia of Rahu (VI 71, 17). Kumbha fell in the battlefield as Mars would fall on the earth (VI, 74, 92).

The poet records his direct observation of the sky during Hanuman's return flight over the sea. The Sun was like a bird, and the Moon looked like a flower. The Pushya and Shravana were like Kadamba trees. Punarvasu was like a large fish, Mars was like a huge alligator and Swati was like a swan (V-57.1.27).

The days of the week were also known to Valmiki. This was natural, for a Nakshatra's associations with a Yoga or lunar days (III 56, 25) or a day in a week were the usual factors for determining auspiciousness. The day of Rama's coronation was auspicious by Pushya's association with Thursday. This is what Sita declared to Rama when she said that it was the Brihaspatya day (III 26, 9).

These data given by the poet confirm the remarks of great astronomers of India like Varahamihira, Bhaskaracharya, Arya Bhatta and others that their knowledge of Astronomy had been a gift from the vedic seers. The contention of the author of *Surya Siddhanta*, that some calculations like those dealing with the number of days from the day of creation or the beginning of the cycle of the lunar days or the chain of parts of the lunar days known as *Karanas* and *Yogas*, were beyond man's scope to verify, is only another way of saying that behind these was a tradition handed from the earliest days of vedic civilisation.

To conclude, it may be remarked that the poet nowhere makes an astronomical reference which is confused or which may on

calculation contradict another statement. The link of the events from Rama's birth to his coronation is all mentioned through mention of the lunar months and lunar dates. The three-yearly adjustment of the solar and the lunar months was a well-known feature of the vedic days. On the day of Rama's birth, the lunar month of Chaitra was extended to the solar Vaishakha. The poet declares this fact by telling us that the Sun was in its exalted position, which is indeed in Mesha or Aries. On the day of Rama's proposed coronation when, as Kaushalya remarks, it was the seventeenth birth day of Rama, (II 20, 45) the lunar Chaitra did not extend to Vaishakha, for with the Sun in Aries, Dasharatha's Nakshatra could not be in evil conjunction with the Sun. In the solar month of Chaitra, it could be so, for the Sun in Meena or Pisces may well be associated with conspiracies and unexpected crisis. Shakespeare's Ides of March in 'Julius Caesar' was indeed another astrological version of the evil aspect of the Sun in Pisces. Strange as it might look, the two great poets connected an unexpected conspiracy in the lives of two great men, in association with the Sun, the lord of all planets, in the close of its yearly cycle.

## VI

### SAMPATI

or

#### Concurrence of Events as an Internal Evidence of the Ramayana Episode

In the hymns of the Rig Veda, we find stories in verse, which seem to need some prose notes as complements to the legends, and as the Mahabharatan epic also has examples of this mingling of verse and prose in telling of a story, we may presuppose a sort of epic narrative even in the time of the Rig Veda. The Puranas have preserved this independent tradition of Itihasa in their own way, and the Mahabharata's claim to have summed up all the traditional lores of ancient India is a proof of the existence of such traditional literature till the age of the Great Epic. The Mahabharatan legends of Shakuntala, Nala, Puru, Yayati and other descendants of Manu, the legends of Garuda and the legend of Agastya, were only some of the older legends reproduced from the Itihasa-Purana literature of earlier ages. Such a tradition is also acknowledged by Yaksha in his Nirukta, when he records meanings of some vedic texts as given by the Itihasisks or the historians. It is nothing strange that all these legends were well known to Valmiki and he mentions them here and there, though he is more particular in making repeated references to the Asuric wars mentioned in the vedic legends. Shambara, Namuchi, Vritra, Bali are some of the older Asura warriors of whom Valmiki is often reminded in the progress of his epic. In the Yuddha Kandam, Atikaya is compared to older warriors amongst whom Prahlada is also mentioned. In Valmiki's time, these Asuric wars must have been sufficiently well known to make their references easily appreciated. Valmiki is clearly establishing a historical



proximity of the story of Rama to the earlier events of Indra's and Vishnu's victories over Asuras.

Three earlier events have been particularly mentioned in the last canto of the Kishkindha Kanda.

These are Indra's slaying of Vritra, Churning of the Ocean, and the event of Vishnu's victory over Maha-Bali. The first of these is reflected in some of the oldest of vedic hymns and is evidently the beginning of the Asuric wars. The Churning of the Ocean, as proved in a previous chapter, is also a vedic legend. This is again a series of major events of the Deva-Asuric wars, of which Vishnu's victory over Bali must have been the most glorious victory on the Devas' side. Ravana, his son Indrajit and their comrades, must have carried on their battles on the same fronts in the last stages of these Asuric wars, in which other Aryan heroes like Dasharatha and Dushyanta had also participated. This relation of the *Ramayana* with the events reflected in the vedic legends is not far to see. Ravana's body is full of scars which remind others of his wounds received in the Asuric wars. Ravana is mortally afraid of Vishnu, and, when he finds Rama overwhelmingly powerful, he declares that Rama was only Vishnu or Narayana in another form. Mandodari, Ravana's wife, also declares that Rama was none else but Vishnu. A very close proximity of the *Ramayana* with the events of Vishnu's three strides, indeed, was the ground of this belief in Ravana and his wife and others. Avatara or incarnation theory in later ages, however, absorbed all such surmises. Vishnu in the vedic hymns is mentioned as the youngest son of Aditi. Evidently, Trivikrama or Vamana had only recently defeated Asuras in the South.

After Vamana's hurricane victory over the great Asura Bali, Rama's exploits on the war-stage had undoubtedly set some popular conjectures, about Vamana's re-appearance in Rama's guise. Some such popular conjecture is preserved in the Mahabharata, where in a passage, quoted earlier, Vishnu is mentioned as having lived in disguise as Dasharatha's son.

Those three events are mentioned by Valmiki in the Kishkindha Kanda, when the fourth great event was in the making. The event of Rama's victory over Ravana was the last great event, though this time it had been purely a human event. The importance of its relation with three events connected with the Devas is clearly emphasized by Valmiki, when he narrates through

Sampati how the sage Nishakara had predicted that "King Dasharatha, a descendant of Ikshvaku, will beget a son, Rama by name, who will come to these forests in search after his wife. You will be doing a great service to the Vanaras in telling them that Sita is with Ravana. For this service you will get back your burnt wings."

There is evidently something occult in this prediction made many years ago. The sage died about eleven years before the Vanaras came to this side for tracing Sita. In Valmiki's language, the sage had been dead for eight thousand years. In the idiom of time, Valmiki associates the cosmic event of creation as the victory of Indra over Vritra and other Asuras with the racial war between Devas and Asuras which Valmiki narrates as a factual pre-historic event. The celestial eight thousand years refer to the cosmic event in a suggestive manner and the vulture speaking about it co-relates the cosmic and the historical events. Only a bird could be the communicator of such an occult message. Valmiki invents or probably discovers the Vulture Sampati who with his younger brother had undertaken a flight to the sun as cosmonauts and who had once assumed a human form to touch the feet of the sage Nishakara. The bird had witnessed the slaying of Vritra by Indra. This long-lived bird had also witnessed the other two great events and had also lived all these hundred years, including the last years of his life on Vindhya waiting for the Vanara chiefs coming in search of Sita. Jambavanta, the eldest of Vanara chiefs, had also witnessed these three events. This bird thus serves the purpose of establishing the historical link of the *Ramayana* story with the wars reflected in the vedic legends. All these four events had extended over a full century. A vulture could live for a hundred years to be a witness of all these four events. This historical link is quite rational and convincing. A hundred years is a sufficiently long period for a full flowering of an epoch of a civilisation. The Devas could have established their supremacy over Asuras during a century. The vedic seers, who had associated the idiom of the same events in the hymns about the cosmic life, could be contemporary amongst themselves only within a century. That nothing is known about these great seers of the Vedas like Vasishtha, Agastya or Angirasa except that they were the sons of Mitra and Varuna, 'born of a pitcher' or 'sons of fire', proves that a catastrophe in their own lifetime had

severed all their relations with the past. The puranic tradition which holds some of the seers like Marichi, Kashyapa, and Pulastya as progenitors of races is a strong proof that just in the times of parents of the vedic seers, Devas and Asuras were not divided. Bhṛiguṣ, the earliest of the vedic rishis, are believed to have given guidance, knowledge and wealth to the Asuras. This again points to a limit of a century within which some vedic seers still had affinities with the race which later on was condemned as the Asuras. The absence of any sense of hatred in the Asura epithet of gods in some hymns like one to Varuna also indicates a near proximity of the past, when Asuras were not a condemned race. A dynamic age changes modes of life and language of a people in a lesser period than a century. Within a decade after partition, the languages of India, especially in the state of Punjab, have changed tremendously. Similarly, fourteenth century English is much different from the fifteenth or sixteenth century English. A hundred years is a wide margin for the growth of life and language of the vedic people which culminated in the *Ramayana*. The information about racial wars is full of implications. Once more, Valmiki stands apart as a poet to whom reason and truth appealed more than fiction and myth. It is not very strange that confusing these pre-historic wars with the cosmic events as mentioned in the vedic traditional school from the oldest times, the Puranic writers had imagined these events to have been enacted over a period of fabulous magnitude. There is, however, a Puranic mention of this period of a full hundred years in connection with the Asuric wars:

“There was a war between gods and Asuras for a full hundred years in times of yore.”

(Markandeya Purana, Durga Saptashati)

The giant size of the vulture who had preserved records of the Deva-Asura wars to be communicated to the Vanaras at a critical moment of their lives, is in itself a link between the *Ramayana* and the Vedas. Valmiki is throwing much light on some obscure Garuda legends of the Vedas. Sampati and Jatayu were offsprings of the Sun's charioteer, Aruna, born of Shyena or the mother eagle. Shyena in the Rīg-Veda is another name for the Sun. These two brothers are thus children of the sunrise. Sampati claims his descent from the Garuda. He knows all the

creation since the first day of life. Jāṭayu also recounts the births of all creatures from the days of Prajāpatis who were progenitors of these creatures. The vulture had probably survived an earlier reptile age, and for its size and rapacity could have swallowed Ravana with Sita, had not Ravana implored him to be allowed a passage over the sea. Mention of such giant creatures as well as of Viradha, Kabandha, and later on of Kumbhakarna proves that Valmiki's visions were not confined to the human civilisation.

Such cannibals as Kabandha, meaning a "headless trunk", were a common feature of all primitive races.

In his essay on Manners, Emerson mentions some cannibals like the rock-Tibbees in the deserts of Borgee "who still dwell in caves like cliff-swallow, and the language of these Negroes is compared by their neighbours to the shrieking of bats and to the whistling of birds. Again, the Bornoos have no proper names; individuals are called after their height, thickness or other accidental quality and have nicknames merely."

The existence of such monsters was confirmed by European adventurers in the sixteenth century, when in their expeditions in new lands, they came across strange creatures. Shakespeare records the popularity of such information about monsters like Kabandha who had their heads in their bellies.

"When we were boys who would believe that there were  
mountaineers·

Dew-lapp'd like bulls, whose throats had hanging at 'em  
Wallets of flesh? or that there were such men

Whose heads stood in their breasts? which now we find,

Each putter-out of one for five, will bring us good warrant of."

Tempest. 3.3.47

Valmiki was aware of those early ages, when reptiles as large as twenty times an elephant were creeping on and flying over the earth. The Vedas and the Mahabharata are clearly referring to what we might call the age of dinosaurs whose extinction once for all is recorded in the legends in which Garuda had killed the Nagas or reptiles. The bird that had made these dinosaurs extinct must have left progeny of a monstrous size. In canto forty-five of the Aranya Kandam, Valmiki mentions a strange incident. When Garuda once perched on the branch of a large fig tree, a whole colony of hermits was in danger of being crushed under the large



branch of the tree. Garuda balanced himself on one foot, and having devoured the pair of elephant-tortoise threw the branch away to the land of Nishadas. 'Gaja-Kachhapau' or a pair of elephant-tortoise swallowed by Garuda may, indeed, be some creeping elephants or dinosaurs which once swarmed over the earth. If Valmiki happened to know the existence of such large-sized reptiles and their bird-enemies which are still larger than these, we should only wonder at the field of knowledge in which the vedic age had advanced.

This Sampati is a reminiscence of the reptile age. Valmiki's emphasis on the proximity of the *Ramayana* event with the early vedic events is clear once again in the Yuddha Kanda where Garuda comes to save Rama and Lakshmana from the magic effects of Indrajit's reptile arrows. A recapitulation of the history of these birds, the monsters and the ape-men, has a place in this section of the *Ramayana* which abounds in information of all kinds. For this, Kishkindha Kanda is verily the richest legacy of the human race.

## VII

### THE VANARA RIDDLE

From the vast field of literature like the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Upanishads, the Dharma Sutras and the Epics, it is evident that the vedic civilisation had an extensive sphere of influence in shaping the life and thought of the Indian people over some thousands of years. Scholars categorically conclude that all which we recognise as the vedic thought in the form of literary compositions had had its complete and exhaustive growth before the birth of Lord Buddha. Inspired or evolved, this vedic civilisation deserves well to be accredited with an intense observation of life in all its aspects. Cosmogony, Nature, Soul and the cause of life as revealed to the earliest vedic sages must indeed have been under a close study of their successors. Vigour of the earliest hymns is a proof of the convictions and faith of the older seers in whatever they knew. The traditional acceptance of the authority of the Veda in all the ethical, philosophical, astronomical and social writings of ancient India is an index of the high standard of knowledge that the vedic age had maintained in every sphere of human thought. Though vedic scholars through all times had been laying an undue stress on the ritualistic import of the vedic thought, there must have been efforts in that dynamic vedic age to think on the problems that man had tried to solve in every age according to his capacity and environments. Distinctly scientific motif in a large number of the vedic hymns and stray references to scientific studies of the material phenomenon in the Dharma Shastras and the philosophical schools, pursued more rationally and systematically in the writings like that of Kanada and the astronomical works like the Surya Siddhanta claiming the Brahmanas as their authority, clearly speak of the inquiries that were made in all the directions of human studies in these earlier ages. Even if most of the inspiration was from the Vedas, much of the knowledge in ancient India must have been

the result of supplementary thinking outside the vedic literature. Such knowledge and information must have been current in the earliest popular literature. The *Ramayana* of Valmiki, being one of the earliest among the popular writings of those ages, should not have missed to record in the popular idiom of the day some of the earliest scientific observations of the race. The Kishkindha Kanda does not fail to strike one as a special section of the epic, aiming to give some rare piece of information gathered by Valmiki on the problems that man has tried to solve in every scientific age.

Here we find a unique topic in the description of the life of the Vanaras. It was a race which lived on fruits, for which it was also known as the Shakha-Mriga or the beasts that lived on branches of trees. Bali claimed that such a free life as the Vanara led should not have tempted the king to annex their land. Sugriva lived in a cave, and the hosts of Vanaras that came to Kishkindha on Sugriva's invitation were all asked to pick up their own provisions from the forests and scatter themselves on the branches of the trees or over hills as they found convenient. Kumbhakarna in Yuddha Kanda also pities the Vanaras as the race that lived in the orchards in the outskirts of larger cities. These Vanaras evidently had developed no agriculture. Hosts of them had come from mountains all over the world. Their number and human characteristics might look to us fabulous unless we know that "thirty million years ago, in the central Africa of the early Miocene ages, little tree-shrews and tarsier-like animals, themselves endowed with grasping hands and stereoscopic vision, had given rise to small anthropoid apes of a very primitive and un-specialised kind."

Some similar facts about the Vanaras are given by Valmiki. Though most of them used rock-pieces and trees as their weapons, they had made implements like the mace. The more advanced like Sugriva and Angada could also wield swords. Some of the facts have been poetised to make them look wonderful, if not mythical.

In order to magnify the dimensions of the poem into a great epic, linking man with mighty elements of nature, Valmiki was describing races that were natural or less civilised than the Aryan race. In the description of Vanaras, Valmiki was blending his

knowledge of the still wilder specimens of the ape-man for making the Vanaras look more natural than less civilised.

Even though Valmiki was not tracing the small anthropoid apes of a very primitive type to the little tree-shrews and tarsier-like animals endowed with grasping hand and stereoscopic vision, he was indeed familiar with the ape that had branched out into many new species, some of whom were emerging into species that scampered on their hind legs.

He was also familiar with the *Austrolopotheccines* who walked upright and showed several human characteristics in skull, teeth and jaws. Though this species is believed to have been incapable of making tools Valmiki seems to have known some cave-apes who were making rough and purposeful stone-implements, like the species whose fossils were discovered in 1956 near Sherik-toutain.

Valmiki's *Kishkindha Kanda* contains a history of the cave-man in the description of the Vanaras. In most of the ape-man features ascribed to the race of Vanaras, Valmiki was only preserving their history in the garb of poetry that makes truth look stranger than fiction. The Vanaras had adopted more organised ways of life in colonies within and around forests for which Valmiki calls them Vanaras and gives them all the features that had belonged to the cave-man. The Vanaras had institutions of marriage, kingships, counsels for exchange of opinion and used hand-made implements. Like many Aryan seers working as pioneers of civilisation in the South, Valmiki was representing the Vanaras as these had appeared to the first Aryan settlers.

Those races were yet on their way to civilisation. Some of them like Hanuman are termed by Valmiki as *Kamarupa*, understood to mean those who could change their form at will. These were those who were handsome like the Aryans and could gracefully walk on their legs. The races to which Bali, Sugriva, Tara, and Hanuman's mother belonged had advanced much in their civilisation. In describing them Valmiki was recording reminiscences of more evolved apes who were nearer to the *Homo sapiens* than any species so far discovered in a fossil. Valmiki had clearly chosen the name 'Vanara' for these races, for the Aryans of the day must have so christened them. Whatever we might say of the poetic idiom of the *Ramayana*, the poet is indeed describing a state of society which closely resembled the



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Aryans, and yet did not deserve the name of Aryans. Making allowances for the elements of poetry and some imaginative efforts on the part of the poet for rounding the edges of his massive work of the epic, much in the Vanara idiom may be taken as an authentic record of some knowledge of palaeontology that Valmiki had inherited or discovered for himself. It does not mean that the *Ramayana* is putting forward a theory of the origin of races, but it certainly gives a proof of the consciousness in that age about the distinctive features of 'apes' and man. Here in the *Ramayana*, Valmiki has mentioned Vanaras as the newer race that was showing intellectual achievements similar to the Aryan race. Some of these Vanaras like Nala were good architects, others like Hanuman were well-advanced in learning. Bali and his wife Tara, could quote Aryan law-books and had ready figures of the population of the Rakshasas in all the countries owing allegiance to Ravana. Tara could read omens correctly.

Valmiki calls Bali, the son of Indra, Sugriva, the son of Surya, Hanuman, the son of Vayu, Nala, the son of Vishvakarma. We may not forget that in Bala Kandam he had described the birth of the Vanara race when the Creator had acceded to gods' request and had decreed the birth of Vishnu as the son of Dasharatha. The Creator had also commanded gods to be born as Vanaras throughout the world and soon the whole earth was overcrowded with the Vanaras of all species. Man and Vanaras were both born of a common ancestor race known as the Devas. Both of these races had been making advancement independently, and when the race known as 'manava' or the descendants of Manu had evolved a great civilisation, some of the Vanara tribes, too, had gone much ahead of the other races.

In describing the southern races, the poet repeatedly mentions features of apes as the cow-tailed and the long-tailed, those with well developed necks like Sugriva and the chinned ones like Hanuman. Some other significant features of Vanaras in the *Ramayana* are mentioned in the Yuddha Kandam. While showing the Vanara chiefs to Ravana from the ramparts, an attendant describes them as quadrupeds:

"These Vanaras, Hara, as they are called  
are drawn towards the earth while they move."

(Yuddha Kandam 27.19)

Though most of these Vanaras could walk straight like man, Rama had instructed them to stick to their quadruped nature while engaged in a fight. "The distinctive features in our armies of Vanaras should be that no Vanara assumes the form of man while fighting." (Yuddha Kanda, 37, 33, 34)

Countless millions of these numbers were drawn from the farthest ends of the old world, while others had come from northern and southern regions. Kesari, Hanuman's father, hailed from the region of the sixty thousand mountains, which as already pointed out before in the geographical reference, was the name for the Atlantis, the submerged continent.

Vanaras were not hunted as beasts by the superior Aryan race, as Red Indians were hunted by the earlier settlers in America or Australia. This is disclosed by Valmiki in Bali's condemnation of Rama's unlawful shooting of Bali. Sugriva's banquets and Tara's support of Sugriva's indulgent life speak of the social evils that had gone deep into the Vanara society. Even in Sundara Kanda, Vanaras' holiday mood in the honey-orchard was an indulgence to a wild extent. Moreover, a suicidal instinct had developed among these Vanaras. Angada and his comrades determined to fast unto death, for they had failed in their mission to trace Sita. This suicidal instinct in the Vanara race is further proved by the fact that when Hanuman failed to find Sita in Lanka, he not only decided to commit suicide, but also envisaged Rama's suicide followed by Bharata's, Lakshmana's, Satrugna's, the three mothers', and of Sugriva.

This instinct, combined with the barbaric despotism of their chiefs, and with their reckless dashing courage, against which Hanuman was warned by Sita in Sundara Kanda and Sugriva was warned by Rama in Yuddha Kanda, were factors which threatened their existence. Their willingness to be victims of large-scale wars of which one is recorded in the *Ramayana*, must have very likely hastened their extinction. Some rock-fossils or cave findings might, one day, prove the existence of the superior ape-man or the Vanara who in some respects was as much advanced as the human race of the Stone Age.

Our preconception that every writing in ancient India was mixed with mythology similar to the Egyptians' or the Greeks', speaks of our ignorance more than proving any primitiveness of the state of thinking in ancient India which produced our earliest

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literature. One may boldly assert that if proper attention be paid to the topics in the *Ramayana* with a faith in Valmiki, who, in justifying a single questionable action by Rama, namely the shooting of Bali, gave such an elaborate exposition of Dharma, much that appears as mere fiction or mythical will be found to be a record of some scientific observations of that age. It is only injustice to the seer-poet, if we find nothing more than an element of novelty in his Vanara episodes. These Vanaras were indeed a contemporary race of man in Deccan in the days of Rama. If we are prepared to believe in the truth of this, we shall have to shift back our surmises about the dates of many other writings of ancient India. Discoveries of new fossils in South Asian countries might, some day, give a conclusive guidance to scholars for determining anew the age of the *Ramayana* when these Vanaras were indeed the contemporaries of man. The apeman living in Asia about a million years ago in Pleistocene age was nearly contemporary with the European Heidelberg man and the Algerian Atlanthropus. He was heavy and chinless. More advanced species living in North Africa, in Western Asia and throughout Europe had the massive brow side, receding forehead and chin.

We may rightly describe Kishkindha Kandam as a living fossil containing a history of the cave-man till he was adopting more organised ways of life in colonies within and around forests, for which Valmiki calls these species as Vanaras. Their way of life and their implements in the *Ramayana* show that these races were not connected with the Aryan race till after thousands of years of their existence in the south, till the Aryan seers as pioneers of civilisation, brought vedic influences to bear upon their ways of living, and till Rama brought about a complete fusion of the different races in the south within the Aryan fold.

## VIII

### VALMIKI'S CONCEPT OF EPIC POETRY

Valmiki has indeed set a wide stage for a pageant of the vedic civilisation. He was passing on the knowledge of his days to the future generations in the poetic language which was much ahead of the contemporary ritualistic language of the Aranyakas, the Brahmanas and the Sutras. In the Sundara Kandam, Valmiki himself mentions a popular Sanskrit language which was different from Brahmana's language with the ritualistic and metaphysical ideas. It was in this language that Hanuman decided to address Sita, for he feared that language of the high-caste would make Sita suspect Hanuman to be Ravana in disguise. (Sundara Kandam 30, 18). In the Kishkindha Kandam, the poet was getting free from the shackles of the traditional idiom, as he had been freeing himself from the traditional ideas in the Aranya Kandam. The poet's genius had left the beaten path far behind him. Much of the information given by him looks to be from first-hand knowledge in the first-hand idiom. Description of the geographical and political conditions in the *Ramayana* was not a recollection of the data available in the Atharva Veda or the Brahmanas. There is little evidence of a confusion, contradiction or surmise which are the blemishes in the Puranic literature.

Incorporation of secular themes like the geographical and the political maps in an epic speaks well of the structural plans of the poet. The influence that the *Ramayana* has wielded for all these thousands of years vindicates Valmiki's concept of a great epic. The Kishkindha Kandam is especially rich in the erudition which in India makes a seer of a poet. Merely an elevated style or a dominant passion could not live so fresh in the memories of the Indian people for all these centuries. The *Ramayana* explores the scope of a great epic through measures of human knowledge as well as through greatness of human character. The Aryans who were proud of their warrior-heroes and even welcomed



heroic inspiration from the tales of adventures of the less civilised peoples whom Sugriva in the *Ramayana* very copiously represents, also had an urge to be enlightened. The purpose behind a great composition could not be different from the concept of art cherished by the people about whom the poet and the great poem arose. The poet could not afford to divorce art from the life and thought of his people. To the Indians, passion has always smelt as a disease of the mind, something that is to be cured or dismissed for recovering the worth of life. Display of glorious careers through war or peace were a march of empty shadows for the Indian people to whom the spiritual links with remoter ages were dearer than success or failures boisterously voiced. It requires a different quality of imagination to appreciate this spiritual urge in the Indian people, just as it requires a different bent of mind to appreciate the depth of faith of the Christian people in the medieval Europe of Dante's days. The purpose in the lay-out plan of the *Ramayana* can truly be appreciated only in its due relation to literature that was produced before and after the *Ramayana*.

Popularity of our great books amongst the masses only proves that Indian masses had kept pace with the Indian seers in the spiritual evaluation of life. Lord Buddha's universal popularity in India in Buddha's lifetime and after is a historic index of the Indian people's mind. Buddha is the single prophet in the world who has claimed worship neither as an incarnation of the Greatest Deity nor as mediator between man and god for atonement of sins. The people who accepted Buddha's message of a spiritual emancipation through righteous action should be given credit for such an original outlook on life.

Aristotle has argued for the display of passion as a means for effecting catharsis or the psychological relaxation that man experiences from such a display in a piece of art. This theory of catharsis attempts to explain the effect of a great work of art in terms of a process of imaginative sobering down of human passions. According to this view, art can, at best, provide a short interval for relaxation of passions in a life of stress and strain which otherwise would result in making a brute of a man. Valmiki allows this, but also works for a more permanent effect, namely the dawning of knowledge in the human mind which art achieves more effectively than a sermon. A great composition helps such

a dawning of knowledge on the widest basis imaginable. Lines like the following in Shakespeare indeed inspire the deeper awakening of knowledge.

.... We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep . . . .  
(The Tempest)

And,

".... Out, out, brief candle!  
Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury  
Signifying nothing."  
(Macbeth)

And,

"As flies to wanton boys, we are to gods,  
They kill us for their sport."  
(Hamlet)

Such an awakening of knowledge in tragedies may be accompanied by a feeling of disgust, frustration or even perversity. To redeem his readers from such tragic feelings, Valmiki is ever at work to charge the awakening of knowledge with a feeling of bliss or joy in which tranquillity or 'Shanta-Rasa' is effected by Vairagya or an objective understanding of the play of passions and working of a destiny.

In the awakening of knowledge in accompaniment of the 'Shanta-Rasa' through a temporary Vairagya, life is revealed as a part of a well-ordained scheme of things in which every soul is moving towards a blissful peace. After the heart-rending scene of Rama's exile in the Ayodhya Kanda, Bharata renounces kingship with a spirit of Vairagya and takes a vow to serve the people of Ayodhya as the hermit-deputy of sovereign Rama till the term of Rama's exile. In the Aranya Kanda, too, when during Rama's movement through the wilderness, the die-hard ogres like Viradha and Kabandha engage him in what might be an exasperating trial of strength for the princely adventurer, the ogres succumbing to Rama's mighty sword are transformed to angelic spirits and reveal how their salvation through Rama had

been declared as pre-destined events. The victor and the vanquished have equal share in the bliss of tranquillity in the unfolding of the divine writ in the hero's life in the wilderness. A similar note of tranquillity is struck by the poet in declaring the satisfaction in the Creator's mind at the fulfilment of the divine purpose after the frowned agitation in Nature at Sita's abduction by Ravana. The reader experiences the same sentiment of tranquillity or the 'Shanta-Rasa' in the Kishkindha Kanda, when after Tara's wailings at Bali's death, a realisation is noted in the Vanara race about their redemption from the mode of sinful existence through what appeared to be a punishment at the hands of a princely warrior.

We meet the same 'Shanta-Rasa' in the detachment or *Vairagya* in Shabari's years of waiting for Rama to pass by her hermitage, where she could convey to Rama messages from the departed sages that destiny was playing its role according to the Creator's plan in every event of Rama's life. Finally, the spirits like those of sage Agastya and King Dasharatha descend from heaven, and there appears the Divine Brahma, and the Divine Maheshwara, at the time of Rama's victory over Ravana to shower the ambrosia of tranquillity and to disclose that destiny of the human race had been fulfilled as it was ordained in the eternal scheme of things.

This is the perennial stream of 'Shanta-Rasa' or tranquillity which the great epic of *Ramayana* is bringing near every man to bathe in it or to drink from it. Every character, episode or crisis, contributes to this perennial stream in the *Ramayana*, while poetry is all the time assuming the sublime in its style through the poet's choice of chaste language, fresh and refined imagery, vast imagination and elevated thought.

Inspired by Valmiki, Vyasa, too, enriched the story of the *Mahabharata* with such characters, episodes and crises as set up the stage for effecting the sentiment of tranquillity or the 'Shanta-Rasa' in which life is viewed as moving towards an eternal bliss in spite of the play of sunshine and gloom in its course.

Homer, in his own way, has succeeded in creating the sentiment of tranquillity or the 'Shanta-Rasa' through lines like:

"I hurl the dart, Jove directs it."

Dante, too, in his *Inferno*, and the *Divine Comedy*, which awakens in his readers the medieval knowledge and faith in the

blessedness of the scheme of things, and thus effects the sentiment of tranquillity.

Milton is also devotionally engaged in the *Paradise Lost* towards making his readers feel the blessed tranquillity in the realisation of the Revealed Knowledge through which the sense of sin and suffering is replaced by faith in God's Grace and the heavenly sunshine.

A similar effect is sought by Shelley in his lines like:

'O Wind,

If winter comes, can spring remain far behind?"

And by Keats in lines like:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

And by Tennyson in lines like:

"Old order changeth yielding place to new,

Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

The *Ramayana* is at the same time as rich in the play of passion as any great epic in the world. Kaikeyi's obstinacy, Dasharatha's helpless fury, Lakshmana's wrath, Sita's silent tears, Kaushalya's deeper agonies and Bharata's touching concern over selfishness perpetrated in his own name, could, as we have seen, give Ayodhya Kandam a worthy place among any great tragedies, but the chief charm in this great work of art was sought to be created not through passion but through a variety of Rasas or sentiments, and Valmiki has maintained the highest standards of these sentiments in his different books. As has been seen, 'Vatsalya' or the parental love is the chief sentiment of the first book and Karuna or pathos dominates the second book. In the third book, violent bursts of passion in words and action work up all the varieties of sentiments known as Raudra or the fierce, Vira or the chivalric and Bhayanaka or the frightful. Rama's wrath when Sita was stolen, his single-handed victory over Khara, mark the poet's genius in displaying the Raudra and Vira respectively. Earlier, die-hards like Viradha and Kabandha had marked the frightful or the Bhayanaka sentiment, where the tranquil or the 'Shanta-Rasa' had immediately followed in their moments of salvation, when these monsters made revelations about Rama's role in the history of mankind. A note of tranquillity had been struck at the time of Rama's entry in the Dandaka, when the sages had greeted the hero with vedic chantings. The hero's



## VALMIKI'S CONCEPT OF EPIC POETRY

exit from the Dandaka was once again saturated with the note of tranquillity in Rama's meeting with Shabari and his bath in the holy lake. In the chopping of Shurpanakha's nose and in the shooting of Bali from behind the trees, the poet has done justice to the Vibhatsa or the Repulsive sentiment as it could be a part of the life-history of a real hero. The hero's personality is the chief source of producing all these "rasas" in the epic. "Shringara" or the love-sentiment was also to be evoked out of the hero's personality and the poet has done justice to his conception of art by rounding off Rama's personality with a most luxuriant play of imagination worthy of a lover. The chief of rasas, as this Shringara is regarded by the Indian poets, may sometimes mark an artificiality in the Indian Kavya. In his description of the seasons and Rama's love-sickness, Valmiki found the genuine emotions of a husband who forgot his wrath and sorrow, while recollecting his amorous sports with his noble wife during different seasons.

*Chapter VII*

SUNDARA KANDAM

I

THE SUMMARY

Climbing the Mandara Mountain, Hanuman so concentrated his mind upon the idea of flight that his stature grew large enough to cope with the gigantic task ahead of him. He prayed to Surya, Mahendra and Pavana, the self-born Creator, and with folded hands he bowed to all the creatures. He struck the mountain with a force that agitated the rocks with the trees, flowers, beasts, hermits and the divine beings that inhabited the mountain. The space-beings expressed wonder and satisfaction at Hanuman's great undertaking. Coiling his tail around him and leaving it behind him, Hanuman, straightened his arms, and collected his feet about his waist. Looking at the sky, he controlled his breath within his heart and while his neck stiffened, he pressed his feet hard against the ground. "Like an arrow shot forth from Rama's bow, I shall fly straight to Lanka, and if Sita is not found there, with the same momentum I shall fly to the abode of gods. If still I fail to discover Sita, I shall bring Ravana as my prisoner. I am determined to succeed in my aim." Saying these words to his comrades, Hanuman jumped up and imagining himself as the Garuda, flew through the air. The trees and flowers that were carried after him fell into the sea. In the sky, Hanuman's two arms looked like five-headed cobras, and his eyes shone like the Sun and the Moon. He was eager to inhale the air in the space above him, and he pushed back clouds to go ahead. Hidden or emerging out of the clouds, he looked like the moon. The sun did not scorch him. The wind rendered him all help. While celestial beings admired Hanuman for his great enterprise, the great ocean, with a desire to help Hanuman in his mission, asked the

Mainaka mountain to arise from the bottom of the sea, where it had been hiding for fear of Indra's thunder, and to serve as Hanuman's halting station on the way to Lanka.

As Mainaka rose high, Hanuman struck it with a force that shattered its rocks. Assuming a human form, the mountain offered rest and fruits to the great Vanara who only touched it with his hand, and telling him that time was running fast, he thanked the mountain and the ocean for their good wishes.

Next came Sursa, the mother of serpents. She had been deputed by the gods to test Hanuman's practical wisdom. As she opened her mouth to devour Hanuman, the great Vanara expanded his form to outsize hers. He, however, soon shrunk his form and as a willing morsel speedily went in and came out of her large mouth. She was pleased to see this agility in him and allowed him to proceed. Hanuman's wisdom was a matter of satisfaction to gods and they wished him success in his mission.

Another obstacle came in Hanuman's way, when he found his speed being arrested for no apparent cause. Simhika, a female sea-monster, had caught Hanuman's shadow. She was, however, soon discovered. Her large size was a baffling problem for Hanuman. He soon noticed her vulnerable limbs, got into her, and tore her open. Gods were pleased once again to see this quick decision in Hanuman, and showered blessings on him. Having covered the hundred yojanas over the Indian Ocean, Hanuman landed on the Trikuta hill in Lanka and waited for the night to find an entrance into the capital.

Lanka was situated on the top of a hillock and commanded a view of the forests and seas around it. It was pleasant all round. Birds, flowers and sea-waves marked the beauty of the spot. The capital was well-fortified and it was a Herculean task to push oneself in, when mighty warriors were on guard. The guardian Demon of Lanka, a terrible woman, saw Hanuman and challenged him. On being overpowered by Hanuman, she surrendered and disclosed that the time was auspicious for Rama to vanquish Ravana, for this was the prediction that had been made by seers long ago.

Jumping over the rampart, Hanuman entered Lanka. Walking on the main road, he marked every house. These sky-scrapers were all beautifully built and well-decorated. With crystal-lattice work, these houses showed a variety of designs. These were as

well lighted as the roads and the crossings. Sounds of musical instruments and jingling ornaments added to the sweetness of music and dances that were going on within every house. Conversations and laughers added life to the city. Some houses echoed with the recitations of hymns and repetitions of sacred charms. Soldiers posted throughout the road stood glorifying Ravana's name. They were armed, and looked fierce. Stone-pestles, axes, lances, maces, swords, cannon, bows and arrows were the arms that they had with them. A hundred thousand of such warriors were on guard throughout the capital while the four-tusked elephants were kept crowding inside the city-walls. Gold, pearls and diamonds, sandals, incense and costly scents were in abundance. The capital was verily a piece of paradise on earth. It was, in a way, dreams of prosperity realised.

The moon was in the mid-heaven weaving the extensive canopy of light all round. Amidst the stars it looked like a proud bull pacing round the cow-shed. As the moon glided over the sky extending its touch of ablution to all creatures, it attracted the sea-waves and illumined the whole world. The splendour that is met on the Mandara mountain, or on the sea at the time of sunset, or in the clouds setting over a lake, was verily claimed by the beauty that was there in the moon. Like a swan in a silver cage, or like a lion in a Mandara cave, or like a warrior on a proud war-elephant, the moon shone in the sky. The moon looked serene like the king of beasts as it stretches itself on a rock-plate, or like the chief of elephants as it stems a great battle, or like a king when he regains his kingdom. In this moonlit night, the Rakshasas, having drunk to their fill and having enjoyed the meat dishes to their heart's content, were eager to be lost in love-sports with their beloveds. While lovers were laughing, singing, challenging each other and embracing their beloveds, their beloveds were throwing amorous glances on them. Some were lying asleep in their lovers' arms, while others who were annoyed, were having deep sighs of despair. Some noblest of them were content to nestle in their husbands' laps. Every one was happy, proud and given to merry-making. Sita, the best of ladies, was not seen amongst these. Like the dim crescent moon, or like the dust-covered line of gold or like a shaft in the scar, or like a patch of cloud carried away by a gust of wind, Sita, whose necklaces jingled in her love-



sports with Rama, and whose red neck and fine brows made her lovely like a forest pea-hen, was nowhere to be seen.

Marking the pleasure-sports of the people of Lanka, Hanuman visited the houses of ministers and personages like Prahasta, Mahaparshva, Kumbhakarna, Vibhishana, Mahodara, Virupaksha, Vidyutjihvas, Viduyt-Mali, Vajra-Dumshtra, Suka, Sārana, Indrajit, Jambu-Mali, Sumali, Rashmi-Kanta, Surya-Shatru, Vajra-Kaya, Dhumraksha, Samipati, Vidhyutrupa, Bhama, Dhana, Virdhana, Sukanasa, Vakra, Shatha, Vikata, Hrasva-Karna, Damshttra, and Shonitaksha. Dances and songs and prayers were heard in these houses, while Sita was nowhere to be seen. From these he proceeded to Ravana's palace, which shrubs and armed guards protected on all sides. Regiments in golden uniforms and fierce warriors were posted everywhere. Chariots, horses and elephants were well arrayed all through. He saw the places for love-sports and the houses for gambling-sports. Thence he passed on to the sleeping-places, where costly beds and sheets were spread in large numbers. Well protected in the centre was the great palace.

The Pushpaka plane was lying inside the palace, and it was high enough to command a view of all quarters. From this Pushpaka, Hanuman could jump into the palace. It was all so splendid everywhere. The inside of every room was decorated with gold, silver and jewels. Scents and incense were making the whole palace a haunt of luxury. The interior of the great palace was richly decorated with pictures, jewels, gold, crystals, and flowers of choicest varieties. Every lamp shone to outdo the other as swindlers outdo each other in tricks.

In the great hall, ladies, hailing from different parts of the world, were lying asleep. They had been drinking and enjoying themselves in love-sports with Ravana. With hair dishevelled, with their ornaments dislocated, and lying in strange poses, these beautiful ladies represented Ravana's glory; for all these had chosen him as their lover. While asleep, some of these kissed each other thinking that they were still enjoying love-sports with Ravana. As they lay crossing and pressing each other, they formed a garland of beautiful faces.

Well-built and comfortable in his royal-bed with gold canopy, Ravana looked mighty and awful. His gold ornaments added lustre to his dark body. At his feet was sleeping the beautiful

Mandodari. She was verily the best of ladies that were there in the hall. Around her were lying ladies who had apparently fallen asleep, while playing on musical instruments. Hanuman took Mandodari to be Sita. He was happy to find her and climbed up and down a pillar to mark his joy.

Soon he was sad to realise that this could not be Sita, who should have been indeed without all these marks of decoration. He went to another chamber, where gold, silver and glass vessels were lying in abundance. This was the drinking hall, where a thousand drunken ladies were lying asleep. Hanuman, who was happy to see all this luxuriant display of beautiful ladies in their most care-free poses, soon felt a sense of impropriety for looking so closely at ladies, most of whom were only half-covered. He soon dismissed his scruples by realising that he had come only to trace a lady and amongst ladies was his rightful duty to search for Sita.

Having searched amongst all the beauties of Lanka, Hanuman felt despair, for he was unable to trace Sita. He calculated the consequences of his failure. Rama and Lakshmana would die if told that Sita was not traced anywhere. Sugriva, Bharata and Rama's mothers would all die after Rama. It would be all so terrible. It was better to die there in Lanka and leave Rama expectant about the news. Soon there was a fresh resolve in Hanuman's mind, and he went to search every nook and corner of the capital once more. At last he came to the boundary wall of an orchard. Bowing to Rama, and with Lakshmana and Sugriva in his mind, Hanuman jumped on to the wall of the orchard.

Sitting on the wall, Hanuman saw that the beauty of early spring had made the orchard an enviable resort. Trees blossomed all round and birds and beasts sported in the groves. As Hanuman jumped from tree to tree, birds fluttered out of their night resorts. Flowers were scattered on the ground and on the surface of artificial lakes. Finally, Hanuman climbed a 'Shimshapa' tree that was in the centre of the orchard and sat watching if Sita would come to the beautiful spot during her walk in the garden. Soon he located a temple which was verily a piece of sculpture. Beside the temple and surrounded by dark ladies, there was a lady clad in soiled clothes. She was thin by continuous fasts, and was heaving deep sighs. She was a flame covered with smoke, or a lotus smeared with mud, or Rohini aspected by Mars, as if it

were. She was looking miserable, emaciated, sad, humble and worried. This was surely Sita, and Hanuman was happy to find her exactly as she had been described to him. She made the gloomy spot bright with her moon-like face. She was young and full-grown. Her bluish hair, cherry lips, thin waist, well-set limbs, lotus-eyes, made her verily a prize for the whole world. She was sitting on the ground like an ascetic. She looked like a queen-serpent. Had she been not sorrow-stricken, she would have been dazzling bright. Like a clouded memory, or like lost glory or like a shattered faith or like lost hope, or like a hindered success, like a confused intelligence, or like fame dishonoured through a false scandal, she looked not what she really was. Some of her ornaments were indeed missing. She was indeed the lady for whose sake Rama was tortured by sorrow, remorse, pity, and love. She was worthy of Rama. Rama was worthy of her.

Her sight moved Hanuman to tears. It was for her sake that Rama had killed Bali who was equal to Ravana in might. It was for Sita that Viradha, Kabandha, and fourteen thousand warriors in Dandaka were killed. For her sake, Sugriva was anointed as the king of Vanaras. For her sake, Hanuman had taken the flight over the ocean and had moved up and down Lanka all through the night. Sita had rightly earned all the love of her husband, whom she had followed to the forests and whom she was over-anxious to see even when in prison in Ravana's capital. It was for her faith in Rama's valour that she still had not lost all hope, and had not despaired of life. With all these thoughts occupying his mind, Hanuman rested on the tree above her.

Sita was surrounded by demon-ladies. These terrible ladies were fond of wine and meat and were carrying all instruments of torture and frightening Sita with terrible looks.

Early before daybreak, when vedic hymns were chanted by the priests everywhere, Ravana came to the spot. He was well-dressed and escorted by a thousand beautiful ladies. He attempted to win over Sita by promising all comforts and glory. He told her that Rama could not recover her and might have even perished in the jungle.

Sita was furious and she humiliated Ravana by reminding him of his royal status and his royal duty to leave others' wives alone. She told him that she could not accept a low creature like Ravana who would soon be killed by Rama and Lakshmana. Ravana left

her with a threat to execute her after two months, if she would not accept his proposal.

The guarding ladies terrified her by telling her that they would tear her up and eat her flesh and drink her blood. Trijata, an old lady, then dissuaded those who were frightening her.

These were the one-eyed, the one-eared, the wide-eared, the ear-less, the spike-eared, the good-featured, the long-necked and large-bodied, the burnt-haired, without hair, with blanket of hair, the long-eared and long-foreheaded, with long bellies and long breasts, with long lips, with chin as the lower lip, with long-mouths, and thighs. The long-sized, the small-sized, the hunch-back, the deformed-faced, defaced, pale, dark, angry, picking up strife, one bearing black iron spear and solid mace, one having a face like a bear, a beast, a lion, a buffalo, or a jackal, or one having feet like an elephant, a camel, and a horse, with hollow skull, having one foot, donkey-eared, without ears, cone-eared, elephant-eared, monkey-eared, without nose, large-nosed, with slanting nose, with removed nose, elephant-nosed, with elephant feet, with large faces, with cow feet, with hair on feet, with overgrown head and neck, with bold breasts and belly, with bold face and eyes, the long-tongued, the goat-faced, elephant-faced, cow-faced, pig-faced.

Trijata told them that the previous night she had a terrible dream which predicted Rama's victory over Ravana. Sita got a consolation from hearing about Rama's victory. Finally the ladies left her and were soon asleep beside Sita who was crying aloud over her misfortunes. It was true, she said, that death spared a man or woman in distress. It was for some sins of her past life that she had been a victim of all this mortification. She felt that her righteousness had not been rewarded by gods. She resolved to kill herself before Ravana could overpower her. There were some omens which boded Rama's victory and she was prepared to wait for some time more. After a month she would surely commit suicide.

Hanuman was watching all this. He was sad to know her forlorn condition. He was now preparing to accost her. He was afraid that she might suspect his identity. If he spoke the high-caste Sanskrit she would believe him to be Ravana in disguise. It was better if he spoke the popular Sanskrit. As he sat in the thick bushes, he warbled out the story of Rama's birth and exile and



Sita's abduction. Sita looked up and found the Vanara rising like the sun from behind the tree.

Hanuman's self-introduction was a surprise to her. The particulars given by Hanuman about Rama's whereabouts, his friendship with Sugriva and his anxiety to see and recover Sita failed to convince her that she was talking to a messenger from Rama. Hanuman described Rama's limbs in every detail and won her faith by handing over to her the Ring with Rama's name engraved on it. On seeing the ring, Sita was moved to tears, and was lost in reminiscences. She wanted to know if Rama still cherished the same love for her. Hanuman assured her of Rama's immediate preparations to march to Lanka to win her back. Convinced, she took the priceless jewel out of her hair and gave it to Hanuman as a token for Rama. She was happy to see Rama's representative in Lanka, and asked Hanuman if Rama and his armies could cross the ocean. Hanuman told Sita that if she liked, he could carry her on his back even at that moment and that none could snatch her from him. The offer was politely declined. Sita thought that it was a monkey-boast, for in a fight Hanuman could be vanquished. Moreover she would not touch a man willingly, and she would feel honoured if Rama himself delivered her from Ravana's captivity. She then narrated an incident which could convince Rama that Hanuman had indeed contacted Sita. It was how Rama had once shot a missile at a crow who had pecked at Sita's breast while Rama lay asleep in her lap. She believed that this incident would remind Rama of his mighty arms and he would soon prepare for a war. While Hanuman listened to her praise for Rama's skill in arms, his heart melted with devotion for Sita and Rama. He begged leave of her and resuming his mightier form of a warrior set about destroying the orchard.

Hanuman uprooted the trees and scattered all flowers and fruits. The ladies' park was completely ransacked. The ladies asked Sita if she knew the Vanara who had been talking to her. Sita denied any knowledge about him. Other guards had collected and they challenged Hanuman to a fight. They were beaten off. Ravana was informed about the miscreant. An army of 'Kinkaras' or slaves was sent to overpower Hanuman. They attacked Hanuman with maces, axes, swords, and spears. Hanuman was too agile to be hit by them. He raised a cry of victory to Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva, and declared that he was Rama's humble

servant. Wielding a great axe, he destroyed the host. Ravana was informed of the episode.

By the time new hosts arrived, Hanuman had climbed the temple. Dismantling a pillar, he struck it hard against another till the building caught fire. The burning pillar served as a terrible weapon against new hosts of soldiers. Jambumali, the great archer, was killed in no time. A minister's son came next in command. He, too, met death at Hanuman's hands. The tempo of the battle had risen and Hanuman had grown more furious. The five commanders who came to attack Hanuman from all sides were crushed under heavy rock-pieces hurled by Hanuman.

Ravana's son Aksha, a young warrior, won Hanuman's admiration. The young man was all out for war and showed feats of courage that were worthy of a bold warrior. His fine archery made Hanuman keep flying up. Finally, however, a rock-piece crushed the archer and the chariot and the horses.

Ravana was worried and commanded his son, Indrajit, to march against Hanuman. The matchless warrior hurled terrible weapons at Hanuman who kept hovering over the warrior with lightning speed. All weapons and arrows missed to inflict any serious injury on Hanuman. Bleeding at various points, the Vanara struck Indrajit every time he could find an opportunity, till at last a missile known as 'Brahma-astra' brought down Hanuman as a paralysed prisoner.

There was a shout of victory among the Rakshasas who tied Hanuman with ropes and dragged him to Ravana's palace. Even when capable of freeing himself from the ropes, Hanuman wanted to avail of the opportunity to have an interview with Ravana. Ravana sat in full majesty amidst councillors. Hanuman was charged to explain his conduct. In polite tones and deeply significant language, Hanuman introduced himself as a follower of Sugriva. He charged Ravana to behave like a king towards Sita and told him Rama's arrows and Sugriva's hosts would soon destroy Ravana and his race.

Vibhishana requested Ravana to spare Hanuman's life as he was a creature who could fly over a hundred yojanas across the sea. Ravana unwillingly condescended and he ordered Hanuman's tail to be set on fire. Immediately, oil and rags were ablaze on Hanuman's tail. Guards, announcing the punishment in the streets, led Hanuman round the city. When Sita heard of

this, she prayed to fire not to burn Hanuman. Hanuman was surprised to find that fire was only friendly to him. He shrunk himself free from the fetters and escaped. He set fire to every house in the capital, sparing Vibhishana's. There was confusion everywhere and people cursed their lot and felt that Hanuman was really a messenger of death for them.

Having done the deed, Hanuman was touched by remorse. He should not have been so wild. What, if Sita also had been burnt in the fire, he asked himself. Soon, however, he heard the celestial beings praising him for his matchless courage and announcing that Sita was safe. He went to bid good-bye to Sita and, getting her blessings, flew once more over the sea. The sky was full of stars and the planet Mars looked like a furious crocodile in the space above. Rohini, Punarvasu and Pushya constellations marked the beauty of the firmament. Hanuman was happy and cried 'hurrah' as he approached the northern coast. Jambavanta, Angada and others were glad to receive him and as they listened eagerly to every detail of his adventure, they looked with wonder at the hero who had saved them all from extinction.

Hanuman now called upon the Vanaras to prepare themselves for the great task ahead of them. Rama was to be helped and the ocean to be crossed. They prepared to see Sugriva to apprise him of the good news. In the meantime, a 'honey-grove' that had always been guarded against these Vanaras by Sugriva's orders, was declared open to them by Hanuman's order. Angada approved and permitted them to have their fill of honey. They drank, ate and quarrelled and ran riot, and struck the guards who reported to Sugriva against them.

Sugriva was happy to learn about Hanuman's return. Soon all Vanaras approached Sugriva. Rama and Lakshmana were happy to know of Hanuman's successful adventure.

## II

### THE PROBLEM OF FLIGHT

The Sundara Kādam opens with the miracle of a long flight over the Indian Ocean. The side-hero, Hanuman, is the right choice of this book.

There is inspiring poetry in every section of the Sundara Kādam. The poet who had worked to display his erudition in Kishkindha Kādam is once more inspired to sing in strains of pure poetry. The flight in the first canto strikes a sense of wonder which is unique in the world of legends. There is a unity of purpose in the world of gods and the world of men and beasts. Cosmic status of Rama's personality is an established fact. Nature in her superhuman and subhuman elements co-operated with Rama's messenger on the great mission of tracing Sita. Hanuman's refusal to avail of rest in the mid-ocean, as offered by the mountain Mainaka, is thrilling and records the lessons of Excelsior fostered in the race by earliest poets. Yet the problem of flight is studied and described in a way that is parallel in all respects to the problem of scientific aviation. Hanuman's firm-footed position on the mountain, with an inhaling of a large volume of air before taking the jump and his super-psychological identification with the divine eagle or the Garuda, speak of the study of the problem of flight in those days. In the yogic cultivation, mystics had touched the problem of flight seriously in their Sutras. Patanjali's Sutra on Yoga speaks of the possibility of flights by the yogic way. Valmiki deals with the problem of flight as scientific aviation on the results of the study of the flight of birds. Was Valmiki giving an exact working of a flying device with Hanuman to make it more poetical by identifying Hanuman with the device as he had done in identifying the Vulture Sampati with some cosmographical efforts in the ancient past? Or was he giving a clue to the future generations to study the possibilities of flying through the study of birds' flights? His details of the flight are in all



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respects realistic enough to raise these questions. The description, if it pertains to a device, comes to an engineering process of collecting a stream of wind within the centre below, rushing of the wind from the front as also through the bottom of the device and streamlining with the arms or the side-wings. Hanuman's prayers to the Sun god, Indra, and the Creator signify some knowledge of the gravitation, electro-magnetic and mechanical problems. The flight starts exactly as at an airport with noise and air following it. The Mandara mountain serving as a landing place with offers of refreshment is also a realistic description.

The Sursa episode records the observation of some space-flights undertaken in ancient days. Sursa is the mother of Nagas or Winds. She marks, in the legendary way, the region where winds are born in the space above. Expansion of Hanuman's body to giant dimensions was a natural phenomenon in a region where atmospheric pressure was tending to zero. A belt of space with such properties has been recorded by scientists engaged in scientific exploration of the space. These scientists have quoted a parallel in the case of fish which live in the depths of the ocean. These fish expand and burst when brought to the surface. Whatever other implications may be discovered in the Sursa legend, Hanuman's escape through this experience by shrinking to a morsel size speaks of knowledge of some belts in space through which even rockets have to speed up lest these should burst by expansion. The poet's details tally with what could be discovered by scientists after thousands of years.

Hanuman's encounter with Simhika, a sea-creature, that arrested Hanuman's progress in flight by her power to arrest shadows of flying creatures, is of historical importance. The word Simhika in its meaning the lion-headed as well as its phonetics remind us of the sphinx which was so well-known in the Greek legends. Sugriva had told Hanuman of this monster. Hanuman's getting into it and tearing its vulnerable parts from within it, were a proof of Hanuman's intelligence in dealing with obstacles that call forth the adventurer's skill more than his valour. This episode, again, has a strange parallel in modern aviation, where some ground instruments, or magnetic fields, should be carefully by-passed in flights. Vibhishana's flight to Rama's camp and his sending and receiving messages from above as given by Valmiki

are also as scientific as modern aviation and wireless communications.

The mighty Vanara was indeed a superman; his tail, claws, and teeth are poetical embellishments to distinguish him from the common man. His miraculous powers in contracting and expanding his body are taken for granted in the story. He is indeed the son of Vayu or Wind. His invincible might, his versatile knowledge, mark him as an offspring of gods. Rightly, indeed, does he boast of his capacity to uproot the island of Lanka and drown it into the ocean. His flight over the ocean is a unique feature, though some Rakshasas and Ravana are also described as capable of flying through air. His feat surprised Vanaras, Rakshasas and celestial beings alike. Vibhishana's strong protest to Ravana against executing the only Vanara capable of a flight over the ocean marks out Hanuman as a figure by himself. His immunity against fire is another touch of the superman in his personality.

This is what we feel about Hanuman in Sundara Kanda and, for this is the book entitled as "The Wonder-ful", but Valmiki has kept the superman of his great poem only within legendary traditions. Like supermen in other literatures, Hanuman is only too agile and strong for those who are set against him. His capacity to hurl rocks at hosts of guards and soldiers sent by Ravana against him, is only worthy of his extraordinary physical strength. In his wild exploits against Ravana's armies was displayed the wisdom of a courageous thinker who expected some sense of justice and appreciation in the courts of a king who had been a world-figure of his day. His presence of mind and self-confidence create a halo round him in the eyes of those who encountered him. The poetic version of his great deeds is only a legitimate rendering of the impression which Hanuman created in the minds of warriors at Lanka. The element of supernaturalism has been successfully kept out of the whole narration. Hanuman's immunity against fire is described only as an effect of Sita's fervent prayers rather than an effect inherent in the supernatural powers of Hanuman's personality. Valmiki has added grace to the might of Hanuman by keeping his feats outside the cheap play of magic powers. He remains the superman of the story of *Ramayana*, as against the inferior magical personalities of the Rakshasas.

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Besides narrating these wonderful deeds of the superman, the poet has given descriptions of Lanka and Ravana's harem and courts in detail in proportion to the epic dimensions of this section of the book. If Ravana was worthy of any note, his revelries and love-sports must have been a part of his personality. The luxurious life of the Rakshasas in Lanka must indeed have been epitomized in the royal palaces. Valmiki has maintained a poetic temper throughout this narration. Ravana is admired through Hanuman's impressions. The ladies in his palaces are the choicest beauties from all over the world, but they had all chosen Ravana as their lover. They were fond of him. The poet has restrained from casting a poisoned look into the interior life of a powerful monarch. The poet had done justice in describing Ravana's personality as it appeared to the people at Lanka.

There is, however, a strange touch of a conscientious regard for the better and nobler mode of life beyond the northern shores of the ocean which Hanuman had left behind him. The licentious life, most heartily accepted by the people at Lanka, was far from the ideals cherished by the poet. The peep into such a life at a time when the after-effects of licentiousness were clearly marked on every face shows the poet's passionless observation of life beyond the Aryan fold. The disorderly slumber of overdrunk ladies at Ravana's palace and in the drinking hall depicts the confusion which such a life carries in its trail. The pageant of sleeping beauties reflects the poet's criticism of a voluptuous life. 'Is not this a sport?', the poet seems to ask his readers. 'Lifeless indeed' seems to be the reader's reply to the scanning eye of the poet searching for Sita in this heap of the slaves of flesh. The poet had indeed abstained from any cynical remarks, and has not pointed out the 'wry' or the elongated or the discomfited faces amongst these ladies of the harem, where revelry and rivalry could not fail to strike with blank despair some who had failed to receive a share of love from their king. The poet keeps on smiling, while he marks the exuberance of pleasure in this land of delights, though he raises a finger of warning against his readers gloating over the sight. Hanuman's ascetic conscience soon reprimands him for having stealthily looked over fair limbs in the drinking hall.

The poet's choicest praise is reserved for the solitary figure in Ravana's orchard. Evanescence in metaphors works and unworks

a strange haze in the reader's imagination. Clad in soiled wrappings, Sita is the 'line of gold' covered with dust or a memory of fame that once was existence itself. Hanuman's flying visit to Lanka convinces him of the worth of the ascetic looking woman who made the orchard bright by her presence. Not in vain were his efforts to find such a specimen of womanhood. All wars were right for the sake of Sita who had sacrificed comforts to accompany her husband in the forests and who, within Hanuman's hearing, had proudly rejected all offers of love from Ravana and had defeated all threats of demoniacal tortures from the ladies set to keep a watch over her.

The poet broods over the touching meeting between a forlorn princess and an unfamiliar face from the wilderness. In the several cantos describing the meeting, sanctity of relations between the two is worthy of the greatness in blood of the one and the high-minded passionlessness of the other. It is the purity of the crescent moon in Sita that fills Hanuman with humble adoration.

He would fain carry Sita on his back beyond the ocean to Rama and settle the issue for ever, but the strain of dignity in the pensive woman looks grimly over the offer as if it were merely a monkey-boast. The far-sighted superman is pleased to be reminded of the gaps in his calculations. The offer was hazardous and had an element of dash in it. The honour of winning Sita had better be left to Rama.

It is a strange balance of poetic temperament that we find in the Sundara Kanda. Amidst monstrous revelry and frightful crowdings in Lanka, the poet strikes a note of purity in the beauty of the moon, purity of Sita's sufferings, high-mindedness of Vibhishana and the glorious achievements of the superman. There is a beauty of conception in the quadrangle of these lovely characters that in their magnificence stand apart from the crowds in the golden capital. The 'solitary' moon is like a lion crouched on a rock-slab and is the queen amongst stars that shine around it. The forlorn Sita is none of the stuff of which ladies in Ravana's harem are made. The 'single voice of justice' in Vibhishana's personality is immortality of truth in chaos of flattering falsehood. The presence of this exotic plant in the land of Rakshasas declares the poet's faith in the final triumph of good over evil. Characterisation of Vibhishana has been well deliberated. His



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moral courage in striking a note of warning to a powerful tyrant must have inspired Vyasa to write of Vidura in the *Mahabharata* who raised similar protests in the court of Dhritarashtra, when injustice was contemplated against the Pandavas or when insolent remarks were made against veterans like Bhishma and Drona. This noble Vibhishana had lived upto his ideals and had suffered indifference from the royal brother. His wife and daughter had sent messages of hope to Sita, when not a soul was kind to her.. With Vibhishana and his family carrying on their lonely existence, the poet reminds his readers that the tree of life in Lanka was not all rotten to the roots. Some similarly kinder souls, Trijata, for instance, were indeed helplessly feeling for Sita in her sufferings. The poet's deepest regards are for the towering personality of Hanuman. The listless superman had only to be inspired and tables were turned against Ravana. Poetry is in her devotional moods in describing Hanuman's exploits. The Muse is happy, while Hanuman flies through air on his way back to India. Most pleasant rhythms and enchanting similes and ecstatic metaphors are reserved for Hanuman's passage over the ocean. The poet watches with wonder the brightest figure in the space above, while the Sun, the Moon, the planet Mars, the Punarvasu, the Pushya and other brilliant constellations mark the bright spots in the sky.

Rightly is the honey-grove revelry of the Vanaras inserted to mark the close of the wonderful story of Hanuman's discovery of Sita. The animal spirits refresh the Vanaras who had long sustained the strain of watchful existence. The poet's relaxation this time is in purer draught of wild honey, and the revellers are the nobler amongst Vanaras who pledge all support to Rama, while drinking to the health of the superman, the side-hero of the epic.

*Chapter VIII*

**THE YUDDHA KANDAM**

**I**

**THE SUMMARY**

Rama embraced Hanuman and felt obliged to him for the extraordinary service rendered by him. What next was to be done worried Rama, who looked to Sugriva for his counsel. Sugriva's encouragement was sincere. It was only a problem to cross the ocean and the victory would be an accomplished feat. Without constructing a bridge, there was no hope for the armies to land in Lanka. Sugriva assured Rama that once the bridge was constructed, the hosts of Vanaras would overpower Ravana in no time. Hanuman gave an account of the defence measures in Lanka. He told Rama that Ravana was well-prepared to meet them and Lanka was well-protected by soldiers and arms. Big cannons to shower stones and arrows over the invaders were laid on the ramparts. These cannons were made of black iron and worked by a mechanism. Ravana's forts were well-guarded by ditches in which water was filled by Yantras, or machines. The capital was approached by four bridges, 'one of which did not tremble' when armies marched over it. Hanuman further disclosed that he had put the bridges on fire and had already damaged the ramparts. In Hanuman's opinion, even Vanara generals could easily conquer Lanka, as Hanuman alone had killed a large number during his visit to that place. Rama was happy to listen to all this. He told Sugriva that the moment was auspicious for marching, as it was Uttar Falguni Nakshatra that day, and the sun was in the mid-heaven.

Rama's prompt orders were endorsed by Sugriva. Soon, the generals were given command for vanguard, the middle and rear-guard. Rama and Lakshmana were carried by Hanuman and

Angada in the middle of the armies. Nala was sent at the head of the advance guard which was to survey the route and to see that the flowers, fruits, herbs and water-springs on the way were not poisoned by the enemy lying in ambush. Marching day and night with great excitement, the army came to the seacoast.

As the armies lay at the seashore, Rama grew sad being reminded of Sita. He opened his heart to Lakshmana and said: "As time passes, I grow sadder, not because Sita is far away from me, or because she was abducted, but because I feel that her youth is passing away. Let wind that has touched Sita's delicate frame, blow hither to soothe me like a touch of the moonlight. Her separation serves as the fuel for the fire of my sorrow which consumes me day and night. I like to sleep under the ocean so that fire of separation does not consume me. By sleeping on the ground, I can hope to keep alive by the thought that I rest on the same earth on which Sita lies. Like a furrow getting moisture from the adjacent furrow which has been well-watered, I shall feel comfort if I sleep on the earth which extends to the place of her captivity. O, when shall I embrace her closely to feel the touch of her throbbing breast? The beautiful-eyed, even while I live, is like an orphan cast away among Rakshasas. It is a strange mishap that Sita, who is Janaka's daughter and Dasharatha's daughter-in-law and my beloved wife, should be sleeping under a Rakshasa's roof. Surely while she gets up, her beauty touches the hearts of those Rakshasas around her, as the beauty of the crescent moon touches the patches of dark clouds in autumn. Finding herself in adverse surroundings, she, who was already so delicate, must have grown thinner. O, when shall I rescue Sita by piercing the heart of the king of Rakshasas? O, when shall Sita, beautiful like a celestial maid, shed tears of joy while throwing her arms around my neck? O, when shall I cast away the pains of separation from her, like clothes that are not clean?" Expressing his grief to Lakshmana, Rama prepared for the evening meditation and was soon absorbed in prayers.

In Lanka, Ravana called a council of his ministers and expressed his concern over the havoc that Hanuman had wrought in Lanka. He sought their counsel reminding them that the best counsel was such as was well-supported by scriptures and in which all counsellors were of one accord. A counsel, he said, where agreement arose after disagreement was only a second-

rate counsel, while a counsel whereby a king was advised to carry on in a reckless way ignoring the gravity of the situation was a third-rate advice.

Ravana's ministers with one accord advised him to cast away fears. They reminded him that he had conquered Kubera, Maya, the Nagas, Gods and Asuras. They proudly declared that Rama was sure to meet death, if he planted his armies in Lanka. Prabhasta claimed that he alone could go and destroy the Vanaras. Durmukha, too, sought permission to show his valour against the hosts of Vanaras. He suggested that some one should be sent to Rama's camp feigning that he had come from Bharata with a message that armies were coming to help Rama. This would make Rama self-complacent, and less-guarded to fall an easy prey to Rakshasas' terrible forces.

Vibhishana then gave a bit of his mind to Ravana. In his opinion, all those who had encouraged Ravana would be helpless when Rama's arrows hit Ravana, for Rama was a matchless warrior and, aided by hosts of Vanaras, he would be too terrible for Ravana. It was best, Vibhishana said, to seek Rama's friendship by returning Sita to him. On hearing Vibhishana's advice, Ravana quietly left the palace ordering his ministers to gather in the council hall to reconsider the matter.

Vibhishana called upon Ravana next morning, when vedic chantings and sacrifices were offered in his palace and once more told him that the best way to save Lanka and the race was to send back Sita to Rama. None of Ravana's warriors, he said, could stand against Rama. He referred to the ill omens that were lately observed in Lanka. It was better for Ravana to appease Rama before it was too late. Ravana, however, dismissed Vibhishana's advice.

In the meantime, Ravana was worried. His sins were eating into his vitals. He prepared to march to battle even when there was no occasion for it. He ordered his soldiers to be ready for an emergency. He called his ministers to discuss the situation. He opened the debate by announcing that Kumbhakarna, his brother, was now awake after a six months' sleep. Placing the facts before the house, he said that he was passionately fond of Sita, and wanted to know if they advised him to return her to Rama.

Kumbhakarna, who listened to all this, was furious over what Ravana had done. Ravana should have consulted them before



abducting Sita, he said. Kumbhakarna was however prepared to fight against Rama and would devour the hosts of Vanaras for Ravana's sake. Rama would not be able to discharge a second arrow at him, he claimed.

Mahaparshva was of the opinion that Ravana should not fear Rama, and should forcibly seize Sita for satisfying his lust as a cock seizes a hen. They were strong enough to defy Rama, he claimed. Ravana was happy and told Mahaparshva that he did not seize Sita by force because he had once raped nymph Punjikasthala and had been cursed by the Creator that if he repeated the evil, his head would be broken to pieces.

Vibhishana once again arose to address Ravana and the house. He held that these ministers had advised Ravana to invite destruction on Lanka. It was time that Sita should be delivered to Rama.

Ravana's son, Indrajit, felt enraged. He told Vibhishana that the latter was speaking like a graceless coward only to frighten them. Submission to Rama was the last thing they were prepared to do.

Vibhishana once more got up to warn the house that a doom was awaiting Lanka and that they should render helpful advice to Ravana. He asked Indrajit to hold his tongue before the elders and leave the house. In his opinion, Indrajit was fit to be slain for this insolence. Ravana was now enraged and charged Vibhishana with ill-intentions against his kin. Vibhishana arose and bidding good-bye to Ravana left the court.

Soon after his departure, Vibhishana was seen approaching Rama's camp. Sugriva called upon the Vanaras to be watchful about the stranger with his four attendants. Vibhishana, who heard these Vanaras suspecting his good intention, withheld his landing and remained in the air. He called upon them aloud to announce to Rama that Vibhishana, a younger brother of Ravana, was anxious to seek Rama's friendship. A meeting of Vanara chiefs was immediately called, where everyone except Hanuman expressed doubts about Vibhishana's good intentions. Hanuman, however, told Rama that it was quite opportune for Vibhishana to seek Rama's friendship, for Vibhishana had surely heard of Rama's great power and also of the patronage given to Sugriva. In Hanuman's opinion, Vibhishana was better received as an ally, as he seemed to be ambitious for Lanka's sovereignty.

Sugriva had his objections, but later agreed to do so as commanded by Rama. Vibhishana was called to approach without fear. On his arrival, Rama asked him to disclose to them facts about Ravana's strength. Vibhishana told Rama how powerful Kumbhakarna, Prahasta and Indrajit were. This was a true description, as Rama already knew much about these warriors. In the presence of all, Rama promised to help Vibhishana in gaining Lanka's kingship. Vibhishana was soon announced king of Lanka. Sugriva and Hanuman, then, consulted Vibhishana as to how the armies could be carried across the ocean. Vibhishana suggested to them that the Sagara, or the deity of the ocean, was indeed friendly to Rama, and if propitiated would allow them a passage. Rama, to whom Vibhishana's opinion was soon conveyed, agreed to offer prayers to the ocean.

In the meantime, being reported by a spy about Rama's movement to the seashore, Ravana sent the parrot-monster Suka with a good-will message to Sugriva, asking him to leave Rama alone. As Suka flew over Rama's armies, he was soon captured and would have been killed, when Rama ordered the Vanaras to spare the monster-messenger his life.

Rama lay on the shore for three days and nights praying to the ocean to allow a passage. It was all in vain and the ocean paid no heed to Rama's prayers. Enraged, Rama took his bow and darted missiles to dry the sea.

There was agitation in the sea, and many whales and crocodiles were burnt to death. Lakshmana appealed to Rama not to be furious. The celestial seers were heard making a similar appeal. Nature seemed to be perturbed over Rama's fury. Hurricane and lightning marked an approaching catastrophe. As Rama charged his bow with the supreme missile, the god of the ocean came out with folded hands to remind Rama that laws of nature could not be violated. The only way to cross the ocean was to build a bridge. The ocean also disclosed that Nala, a Vanara general under Rama, was gifted with architectural skill, and could build a bridge to connect Lanka with the shore. This was accepted by Rama, and soon the Vanaras uprooted countless trees to stem the sea for a site for the bridge. The work was rapid and within five days the bridge was completed. Armies soon marched to Lanka and were arrayed outside the city ramparts in the Garuda form of strategy. The spy Suka was now released to fly to Ravana.

When Ravana learnt about Rama's encampment outside his capital, he sent Suka once again with Sarana to make a full survey of the enemy forces. As these moved from camp to camp in disguise, they were discovered by Vibhishana and were given a sound beating. They were, however, spared on Rama's orders and allowed to carry an ultimatum note from Rama that if Ravana did not surrender, Lanka would be attacked the next morning.

Spies after spies were sent by Ravana, and every time they described Rama's forces to be invincible. All the Vanaras were, according to these spies, progenies of gods and were great warriors. Ravana was still adamant and he defied all good counsel. He decided to play a trick on Sita to win her. An artificial head and arm of Rama were presented to her with information that Rama had been killed and the Vanaras routed. Sita cried and fell unconscious. Soon, however, an attendant Surma informed her that it was a trick played on her. Within Sita's hearing Rakshasa armies were preparing for war, while Vanaras' loud cries marked their advance.

In the meantime, Ravana called another council of his ministers. Malyavan, an old minister and maternal grandfather of Ravana, advised him to leave the path of evil and to make peace with Rama. Malyavan told him that gods helped the righteous ones and Rama was sure to be victorious. He pointed out to Ravana that there were omens which foretold destruction of the Rakshasa race. Ravana was highly enraged and ordered his army to be ready for war. Ravana posted his great generals at the different gates. He himself was to be at the north gate, while his son, Indrajit, was posted at the western. Rama, too, posted his countless hosts under the charge of generals, while he himself took charge of the northside in order to meet Ravana. Lakshmana and Sugriva were with him. They mounted the hill Suvela to have a look at Ravana. Seeing Ravana, Sugriva jumped far into Lanka and seized him. There was a terrible duel between the two, when finally Sugriva flew back to his camp. Sugriva's boldness was appreciated, but he was advised not to expose himself to such a risk again. Before the armies marched, Angada was sent to Ravana with a note asking him to surrender or to come out for a fight. Angada showed a marvellous feat by carrying away four Rakshasas who seized Angada under Ravana's command. These Rakshasas were dropped from a height. The armies marched

under Rama's command. There were terrible fights on all fronts. Every general on either side was engaged in a deadly battle against the general on the other side. The battle continued even after the sunset. Angada hit Indrajit hard at every onset, till Indrajit by his magic powers became invisible. As every one was praising Angada for a victory over Indrajit, the latter struck arrows at Rama and Lakshmana. Even when all Vanara chiefs were out to hunt him, he remained invisible and by a constant discharge of arrows at Rama and Lakshmana was able to hold them paralysed till both fell on the ground bleeding copiously. The Vanara chiefs were crying at this unforeseen calamity.

While Sugriva and his armies were running helter skelter, Indrajit shot arrows at every Vanara chief. Vibhishana ran to Sugriva and sprinkled water over him, telling him that the situation was critical but not hopeless. He asked Sugriva to keep up Vanaras' morale, for Rama and Lakshmana were under a spell of magic and, if protected, were sure to regain consciousness. The Vanara generals stood around Rama and Lakshmana guarding every inch of space with trees. Ravana, on the other side, was jubilant over his son's victory. The city was illuminated, and Sita was informed about the death of Rama and Lakshmana. In Trijata's company, Sita was taken in a flight over the battlefield. Sita saw Vanaras surrounding the two warriors lying in the field. She was overwhelmed with despair and cried 'fie' on those astrologers and saints who had foretold her about her being a fortunate empress. Trijata, who was moved to hear Sita's lamentations, consoled her by disclosing that a widow could not be carried by Pushpaka plane. In her opinion, Sita was still fortunate and Rama and Lakshmana would somehow recover from the magic effect.

In the meantime, Rama, who still lay paralysed, regained his consciousness. On seeing Lakshmana lying beside him, he cried like a man for whom all hope was lost. He advised Sugriva to return to Kishkindha leaving him there to die near Lakshmana. While Rama cried in despair, Sugriva asked a Vanara chief to carry Rama and Lakshmana safe to Kishkindha, while he himself would fight against Ravana and rescue Sita.

When Vibhishana once again came to Sugriva, the Vanaras were frightened to see him and taking him to be Indrajit ran away in all directions. Vibhishana asked Sugriva to cheer up the



Vanaras. As the Vanaras once more stood firm, an old Vanara advised Sugriva to send Hanuman for bringing some herbs from the Eastern Sea. Suddenly there was a storm, and trees and beasts were blown into the sea. Huge snakes were seen running into the holes. Soon there appeared the divine Garuda, on whose approach the magic influence of Indrajit's serpent arrows was over. As Garuda touched Rama and Lakshmana, they were healthier than ever. Garuda parted advising Rama to be watchful against tricks of his wicked enemy.

Vanaras once more were happy and raised their war cries. Ravana was worried over their recovery. He sent Dhumraksha, the smoke-eyed Rakshasa, at the head of a large army. Thick battle ensued and there was a great slaughter on both sides, when Hanuman struck Dhumraksha with a rock-piece. Vajra-Damshtra, or the hard-tooth, was the next warrior sent by Ravana. He displayed his skill in archery. This Rakshasa was held by Angada, and after a long duel, Angada beheaded him with a sharp sword. Akampana was the next warrior-chief who came to fight. A bloody battle ensued once more when Hanuman came to the Vanara's rescue. After a hard fight, Hanuman was able to kill this great archer. Prahasta, with his deputies, came next in command. It was a terrible fight and every one was engaged in a bloody duel with his opponent. While Prahasta's deputies were killed by other Vanara chiefs, Nala ran to meet Prahasta whose arrows baffled every one. Finally, Prahasta was overpowered by Nala who crushed him under a heavy rock-piece.

When those, including Prahasta, were killed in the battlefield, Ravana was beside himself with rage. He marched to the front amidst loud cries of victory from crowds. Indrajit, Atikaya, Pishacha, Mahodara, Trishira, Nikumbha and Narantaka guarded Ravana on all sides. Rama saw Ravana advancing with his comrades who were his sons and nephews. Ravana was indeed a matchless personality as Rama observed. Rama was pleased to have the opportunity to punish Ravana for the great wrong done by him. In the meantime, Ravana had killed hundreds of Vanaras, had struck effective blows on Sugriva and had nearly killed the Vanara king by his arrows. Other Vanara chiefs who attacked Ravana from all sides were unable to hold their positions against his shower of arrows. Hanuman gave a fight and was much praised for his strength and valour even by Ravana himself, but

Ravana's blows laid Hanuman senseless on the ground. Ravana kept on advancing and struck Nila, who was agile enough to jump over Ravana's chariot and escape his fierce arrows for some time. Finally however, Nila was overpowered, and Ravana now came face to face with Lakshmana. There was a display of skill in arms on both sides, but Ravana proved mightier, when he struck a missile at Lakshmana who fell senseless on the ground. Ravana tried to carry away Lakshmana in his arms, but the divine element in Lakshmana made his body too heavy to be carried away by Ravana. Rama now rushed to the spot and there ensued a terrible fight between Rama and Ravana. Ravana looked languid and exhausted and was unable to stand against Rama's arrows. Rama, however, allowed Ravana to retire for rest. Humiliated as he was, Ravana went back to Lanka and pondered over the situation.

He thought of his brother Kumbhakarna, an omnivorous cannibal, who under a curse lay asleep for six months and when awake for a day, devoured man and animal in fabulous quantities. Ravana sent cartloads of boiled and raw meat and jarfuls of liquor to Kumbhakarna's cave where the giant snored so heavily that men were blown away as they entered the cave to arouse the sleeping Rakshasa. No drum sounds or goading could arouse him. Elephants were made to stampede over him when he turned aside and devoured ravenously the food piled before him. Kumbhakarna came to know of the state of affairs and would have marched straight to the war-front, but some one requested him to see Ravana. He told Ravana that the latter had not acted wisely in abducting Sita. Ravana and another brother Mahodara, meaning large-bellied, told Kumbhakarna that it was not the time for discussion. Mahodara, who was only a coward, advised Ravana to seduce Sita by tricks and keep her at home, for his armies were strong enough to fight against Rama. Kumbhakarna offered to go and destroy the Vanaras.

As he advanced, Vanaras fled in all directions to see such a large person. He was six hundred bow-lengths in height and a hundred in girth. He ate handfuls of warriors and all rocks thrown at him broke to pieces. In spite of Nala's and Sugriva's orders and persuasions to the Vanaras to stand firm, there was confusion and retreat among the Vanaras. Thousands of them were killed and injured by Kumbhakarna. All the Vanara chiefs

like Hanuman and Angada displayed their might against him to no effect. Sugriva fought well but soon lost consciousness, when struck by Kumbhakarna who carried him to Lanka. Hanuman resolved to help Sugriva's release but he left it to his chief to show his powers. As Sugriva came to his senses, he was able to fly back to his camp.

Kumbhakarna once again returned to the field and fought more desperately than ever. When Lakshmana came to face him, Kumbhakarna was already playing havoc. Thousands fell a victim to his strokes. He called on Rama to come along and face him. Rama shot missile after missile at him, but every stroke made him only madder. His giant arms swayed around striking warriors that fled in all directions. He spared neither foe nor friend. When Vibhishana came to strike him, the giant asked him to get away from him, for he was sure that every one of his kith and kin was certain to be killed in the war and there should be left some one to continue the race. He wished Vibhishana to survive under Rama's protection. Vibhishana was moved to tears and reflected on the wisdom of his giant brother.

In the meantime, Rama found the giant growing more furious. He struck burning blows on every Vanara chief. Rama's arrows cut his arms, but still the giant fought with his legs which were cut one by one, and then he fought with his open mouth. Finally when the head was cut off, the trunk fell crushing thousands of warriors under him. Half of his trunk fell into the sea, while the other half fell against the ramparts. The Rakshasas took to heels and broke the news of Kumbhakarna's death to Ravana.

Ravana cried aloud to hear the news. He was now fully conscious of the coming doom. He felt that Vibhishana had indeed rendered him a sound advice. It was a losing battle on his side, and very few warriors were left to depend upon.

Ravana's sons and brothers surrounded him, while he marched to the battlefield. They were all well-versed in the use of arms. A terrible battle ensued on all fronts. His son, Narantaka, was able to destroy thousands of Vanaras with his powerful arrows. He was, however, soon engaged by Angada and after a long fight fell dead in the battlefield. Devantaka was next engaged by Angada and blows were received and given on either side. Trishira, another son of Ravana, showered arrows on Angada. Hanuman came to engage Devantaka who fought furiously, but

fell dead. Trishira was still fighting and he shot arrows at Nila. Mahodara, his uncle, joined him and both struck Nila with blows and arrows. The unarmed Nila proved a strong match for both and, recovering from their blows, he hurled a rock against Mahodara who was crushed to death under it. Hanuman, in the meantime, had killed Trishira's horses and charioteers. Both the warriors were desperate. Hanuman rushed to seize Trishira by his neck and snatching the enemy's sword beheaded him.

Mahaparshva, a brother of Ravana, came next to fight against the Vanaras. His mace dealt terrible strokes at them. Rishaba engaged him and after a long fight was able to kill him. Unmatta, or the Mad, was the next to fall under Gavaksha's rock-pieces hurled at him.

Atikaya, another of Ravana's sons, came desperately to the war-front. His chariot shone bright and was equipped with various arms. He announced his approach by a loud war cry. He was of a giant stature and could be mistaken for Kumbhakarna. Vanaras fled away on seeing him. 'Rahu' was the insignia on his banner. As Vibhishana told Rama, this son of Ravana had been blessed with great might by the Creator. He was a great archer. As Atikaya discharged his arrows, Vanaras felt unequal to face him. He straightaway came to challenge Rama, declaring that he would not fight against ordinary Vanaras. Lakshmana came to engage him. Both showed their skill in arms and, after a long-pitched battle, Atikaya fell a victim to Lakshmana's Brahma-Astra or the Supreme missile.

Ravana was aggrieved to know of Atikaya's death. Events so far had been to his disadvantage and he burst into a mood of despair in the presence of all. Soldiers were, however, ordered to take a more serious view of the besieging forces.

Indrajit offered himself once more to go to the front. Ravana praised his skill in arms and his magic powers by virtue of which he had been victorious over gods in the past. Before leaving for the battle, Indrajit offered a sacrifice to fire. Every warrior was paralysed as the arrows from Indrajit's bow fell in showers. Indrajit's success made the Rakshasas more violent than ever. Rama stood helpless as he failed to spot Indrajit hidden in the clouds. Lakshmana and Rama stood close to each other to receive Indrajit's missiles, for they wanted to save others from this unseen



plague of arms. Indrajit left the battle, when he thought he had killed the two princes.

Vibhishana and Hanuman, with torches in their hands, moved about to console their soldiers lying in the field. In the darkness of night, they searched for the chiefs. Vibhishana came to Jambavanta and called out to him. Jambavanta, who was hardly able to see or stir, asked Vibhishana if Hanuman was still alive. Vibhishana expected an old warrior to inquire after king Sugriva or Rama before inquiring after another; but Jambavanta told Vibhishana that if Hanuman was alive even the dead could be brought to life. Hanuman then touched Jambavanta's feet and awaited his counsel.

As instructed by Jambavanta, Hanuman prepared to fly to Himalayas for bringing the four herbs which could help them to save every one lying wounded in the battlefield. Hanuman expanded his form and with lightning speed brought the rock-piece on which these herbs grew. The smell of these herbs brought every one to normal health and Hanuman flew back to deposit the herb rock at its proper place. He earned praise from Rama for this gigantic task.

Sugriva now ordered his armies to raid Lanka at night and carry arson there. He thought that most of the warriors having been killed, the resistance would be light. Most of the buildings, including armouries, were put to fire that night. Intense combats took place everywhere, where Vanara chiefs were engaged by Kampana, Kumbha and Nikumbha. Kumbha, who was Kumbhakarna's son, won great praise from his adversary, Sugriva, who compared Kumbha to Prahlada, Bali, Indra, Kubera and Varuna in strength. The Rakshasa-warriors were, however, killed by Vanara chiefs like Angada, Sugriva and Hanuman. Makaraksha was the next great warrior from Lanka who challenged Rama and was killed by him.

Once again Indrajit was exhorted by Ravana to go to the front, and to display his successful and matchless skill in arms. His sacrifice to fire was again successful and he was confident of his victory. Keeping himself hidden in the clouds, Indrajit struck everyone of the Vanara chiefs. Rama and Lakshmana were also struck with arrows. Lakshmana sought Rama's permission to use a missile which could destroy all Rakshasas hidden or exposed. Rama dissuaded Lakshmana from using such a terrible weapon

which would spare neither the young nor old. Rama, however, prepared to discharge another arrow which was sure to kill Indrajit, hidden or exposed. Indrajit, however, heard of Rama's intentions and left the battlefield.

He soon came back with a magic duplicate form of Sita in his chariot. When Indrajit once again showered arrows on Vanara chiefs, Hanuman came to confront him. In the presence of Hanuman, Indrajit cut this magic Sita into pieces. Hanuman was moved to tears and so were others. The Vanaras went crying to Rama and informed him of what they had seen. A gloom was cast over all. Lakshmana consoled Rama and grew furious. He regretted that Rama had been so considerate in his actions, and from the beginning of the exile to the present day had suffered so heavily for sticking to the path of righteousness. Those who were practical in their approach to life were always seen happily realising their aims, he said. If Rama had not relinquished his rights to the throne, the present calamity should not have been there, he added. In Lakshmana's opinion, when gods like Indra, sometimes had subordinated means to their ends, Rama should not be so scrupulous in war, but should allow Lakshmana to use his destructive missiles against Ravana. When Rama lay in tears over this cruel end of Sita, Vibhishana came to comfort Rama. He told Rama that Indrajit had played a trick over them and leaving them in confusion had retired to a grove, where he was offering a sacrifice. He disclosed that if Indrajit was allowed to complete his ritual, it would not be possible even for gods to overpower him.

Lakshmana was sent to Nikumbhala's temple to distract Indrajit. Vibhishana and Hanuman accompanied him. A terrible fight ensued between the two armies and Indrajit had to come to the front. Vibhishana was decried by Indrajit for joining an enemy. Vibhishana reminded Indrajit that the fault lay on Ravana's side who had turned out a brother merely for a difference of opinion over an issue. The battle continued and Vibhishana took active part in the battle though he avoided Indrajit towards whom he was scrupulously affectionate. Lakshmana and Indrajit were now engaged in a combat for three days and three nights. Both were equally dexterous in the use of arms. Arrows met in the air to display their beautiful flashes. Finally, Lakshmana's arrows pierced through Indrajit's armour and killed him.

Lakshmana, too, was sorely wounded. He returned to Rama and earned his love and praise. Herbs were once more used to cure Lakshmana and Vanara chiefs. Sushena, Vanara chief, was the physician whose skill brought normal health and vigour to all.

Ravana's mourning over Indrajit's death was followed by a furious resolve to kill Sita who was the cause of all this destruction. Sita was frightened to see Ravana approach her with a drawn sword. She cursed the day when she had refused Hanuman's offer to carry her to Rama. Ravana was, however, persuaded by Suparshva to spare Sita and seek his revenge through a display of his arms.

The next day, countless soldiers in Lanka marched against the Vanaras. A terrible battle ensued on all fronts. The outweighing number of the Rakshasas brought Rama out of his camp. It was a dark day in the history of the Rakshasa race, for when Rama showered volleys of arrows on them, thousands were laid on the ground in the twinkling of an eye. It was a unique display of Rama's skill in combating against odds. Within a few hours ten thousand warriors in chariot, eighteen thousand of elephant riders and fourteen thousand of cavalry and two hundred thousand of infantry fell in the battlefield.

Every home in Lanka was gloomy. Heart-rending cries from every quarter filled the air. Ladies shrieked and cursed the day when the ugly fiag of Shurpanakha had attempted to win Rama's love. Rama's victory over Viradha, Kabandha, Khara and Dushana and Bali should have been an eye-opener for Ravana. When only a single Vanara like Hanuman had killed many warriors and had put the capital on fire, should not have Ravana realised that hostility against Rama meant only destruction for Lanka? The people whispered to one another that Ravana should have been wiser to restore Sita to Rama even then, when the great bridge over the sea was built, or when the noble Vibhishana sounded a warning note, or when Kumbhakarna was killed, or when Atikaya and other warriors were slain, or when Indrajit was killed in the battle. While thus engaged in mourning, the ladies who had lost their husbands and sons looked upon Sita as a calamity lodged in Lanka, like hunger which had once visited Danavas to exterminate them.

Ravana was agitated to hear these cries of the ladies in Lanka. He commanded all the remaining warriors to prepare for the

battlefield. As he marched at the head of these warriors, there were ill-omens at every step. With various weapons, missiles and arrows, Ravana overshadowed the fighting hosts on all sides. Sugriva engaged Virupaksha and Mahodara and killed them, while Angada overpowered Mahaparshva.

Ravana grew wild and, striking all Vanaras who were confronting him, came to challenge Rama and Lakshmana. Rama, too, was happy to face Ravana. It was a terrible display of fire-arms on both sides. Both were equally great masters in attack and defence. Their arrows met and crashed in the sky.

While thus engaged, Ravana was challenged by Vibhishana. An infallible missile was soon seized by Ravana to be hurled at Vibhishana. In the meantime, Lakshmana had come to Vibhishana's help. The missile struck Lakshmana who fell unconscious in the battlefield. The heavy weapon pierced through Lakshmana's heart and all the Vanaras failed to pull it out. Rama, who finally pulled it out, was sad to find Lakshmana so helplessly lying before him, but there was no time to attend on the fainting Lakshmana. Ravana was wildly showering arrows on Rama. Once again a terrible battle ensued. Rama was furious and called upon all warriors, gods and seers to watch his skill in arms. Arrows hissed through air in thousands and the bow strings twanged incessantly on both sides. Ravana's charioteer, finding his master losing the day, took him away for a respite.

Rama now came to attend to Lakshmana who lay in the camp. Everyone was sadly watching the dying hero, when Sushena consoled Rama and asked him to send Hanuman over to the Himalayas for bringing some herbs. Hanuman flew as directed and within a few hours was back with the mount over which grew these herbs. Sushena's medical treatment of Lakshmana was indeed a miracle. As soon as Lakshmana regained consciousness, he called upon Rama to pledge to him that by the sunset next day they would see Ravana killed in the battle. Rama took a vow to do the deed expected of him.

The next day was the day when hordes on both sides watched Rama and Ravana engaged in one of the bloodiest battles of the world. The pedestrian Rama smartly engaged Ravana who moved in all directions on his chariot. Some gods sent a celestial chariot for Rama. Matali, Indra's charioteer, drove Rama as commanded and the fight between Rama and Ravana grew more terrible than



before. It was a battle without a parallel. Up and down, right, left and slanting turned the two warriors to outbeat each other. Gods and Asuras came to watch the fight between their respective champions.

Sage Agastya came to Rama and whispered to him to meditate on the glory of the sun-god for killing Ravana. The mystic psalm to the sun-god was recited three times, when Rama felt highly inspired and powerful. There were omens that boded Ravana's death.

Ravana flew round Rama's chariot. Copper-coloured, yellow, dark and white were the sun's rays as they fell on Ravana. A dust storm blew on all sides. Both the warriors were furious. Ravana was desperate, when his flag was brought down by Rama's arrows. Rama's arrows in quick succession flew over him and chopped his head, when, to the surprise of all there arose another head and still another. When a hundred heads had been similarly cut off, Rama looked worried. Matali then reminded Rama to aim the supreme missile at Ravana's heart. This was indeed the last weapon used and soon Ravana fell dead on the ground. There was a cry of victory on Rama's side and the Rakshasas took to their heels. The sky was clear and gentle breeze brought comfort to all.

Vibhishana mourned his brother's death and was consoled by Rama. The ladies from Ravana's palaces came mourning for their dead lord. Their cries and tears overwhelmed every onlooker.

Ravana's chief queen, Mandodari, came to the scene. Her cries were heart-rending. She cried that Ravana's obstinacy, his disregard for good counsel and his lust had brought the calamity over the Rakshasa race and his unholy passion for Sita had indeed hastened the fall of the great family of the Rakshasas. In her opinion, Rama was surely the four-armed Vishnu, for who else could kill Khara and Dushana and overcome Ravana? While she lamented, Rama asked Vibhishana to perform funeral rites for Ravana who had died a valiant death. The funeral over, ladies retired to Lanka.

Vibhishana was then appointed king of Lanka amidst rejoicings of his friends and sympathisers. Hanuman was then sent to Sita with a message from Rama that Ravana was killed and her miseries were over.

Hanuman came where Sita was sitting amidst ladies who

guarded her. She was apprised of the lucky event. Overwhelmed with joy, she could hardly utter a word. She said, she would be glad to see Rama and others.

Rama then ordered Vibhishana to arrange for Sita's arrival. She was given bath and ornaments before she came out of Ravana's palace, for such was Rama's wish. As she approached Rama's camp, she was modestly shrinking into her clothes. People crowded to see Sita's meeting with Rama. Rama showed a little displeasure when Vibhishana commanded the police officers to keep the crowd away. Rama hinted that his permission should have been sought for any such orders. Rama's temper shocked every one all the more, when in the presence of all, Rama told Sita that as honour demanded, he had rescued her from Ravana's captivity, but as a prince from a great family, he could not accept back a lady who had been carried away by another and who had been living in another's house. Rama declared that she was now free to go anywhere she liked.

Amidst her sobs, Sita reminded Rama that she had been with Rama since she was a child, and Rama had known her character to be spotless. She said that it was a pity that Rama was suspecting her as a commoner suspected his wife. As it was Rama's wish that she should go elsewhere, she offered to enter the fire and end her miseries. According to her wish, fire was raised by Lakshmana and bowing to Rama, Sita entered the fire. There was a commotion in nature, and gods including Kubera, Indra, Shiva and Brahma appeared above to convince Rama of Sita's purity. These gods declared to Rama that he was the Supreme deity known as Vishnu, the cause of all life. Rama modestly declared that as far as he knew himself he was only a man.

Soon there came out of the fire god Agni, with Sita in his lap. Sita was bright like gold and looked fresh and young with her ornaments. Agni told Rama that Sita was pure and should be accepted by him. Rama accepted Sita saying that he was fully aware of Sita's devotion for him.

Rama told Agni that the fire-test for Sita would only convince the world that Rama had not been an indulgent husband and had accepted Sita only for her purity of character.

Maheshwara, then, praised Rama for rescuing the world from Ravana's atrocities. Lord Maheshwara wished Rama to return to Ayodhya and be a source of happiness to Bharata and others,

and in due course of time would be renowned for his charity and horse-sacrifice.

The spirit-form of Dasharatha then appeared in a celestial car. He blessed Rama and Lakshmana and declared that Rama's deeds had done good to all the creatures and had fulfilled gods' ambitions. In fact, Dasharatha added that Rama was the Supreme Being which was the subject of the vedic hymns.

Then appeared Indra who asked Rama to seek a wish. Rama sought that all Vanaras who had died for Rama's sake should come back to life. This was done and the Vanaras sprang to life once again. All were happy and asked Rama to return to Ayodhya.

Rama asked Vibhishana to order for the 'Pushpaka' plane to carry Rama and his brother and wife to Ayodhya. The plane was got ready, and when Rama, Sita and Lakshmana took their seats in the Pushpaka, Vanara chiefs requested Rama to take them also to Ayodhya. Vibhishana, Sugriva and other Vanara chiefs also took their seats in the plane. The plane flew at a great speed and Rama pointed out to Sita the spots where they had killed the warriors like Indrajit, Kumbhakarna and Ravana. The aerial view of the ocean, the bridge and the Dandakaranya and Kishkindha was now a pleasant reminder of their life in the wilderness. At Kishkindha, Tara and other Vanara ladies also boarded the plane. As the plane approached Ayodhya, Hanuman was sent to Bharata to inform him of Rama's arrival, while the plane had landed at Bharadvaja's Ashrama. After paying respects to the sage, the party proceeded to Ayodhya. They were received by Bharata at the royal outhouses. The meeting was thrilling and moving. All were happy. Rama was crowned as the king of Ayodhya on the Pushya day. Gifts were given to Vanara chiefs for their services to Rama. Once more Ayodhya bloomed to prosperity and power.

## II

### THE WAR EPIC

The war epic in the *Ramayana* is a complete piece of literature. Its place in the world's war epics is unique. In the poet's own words, the fight between Rama and Ravana was without a parallel. These remarks apply well to the *Ramayana* war from the beginning to the end. Rama's invasion of Lanka starts as a process of spiritual experience. For an Aryan warrior, the will to fight was synonymous with the will to perform a sacrifice. A high sense of fairness had rightly seized the Aryan soldiers for whom war was more of a ritual than an occasion to inflict. The chiefs who had, in their younger days, fought in distant lands while their elders sat in royal glory as the sacrificers at home, must have received instructions in a martial code from these seasoned elders. Rama showed great maturity in arranging the Vanara legions. The advance guard under Nala, the Vanara offspring of Vishvakarma or the divine architect, might recall the technical army wing of the sappers and miners who go ahead of the main army. The advancing host was cautioned against being taken in by the enemy tricks like poisoning of water-springs and fruit-bearing trees. Construction of the bridge within five days speaks of the high level of military consciousness in the adored leader of these armies. Not a day was wasted since the day of the march. A meeting of the war council was held everyday to discuss new situations and moves. Rama's potent arm held all warriors under a strict discipline, the last of whom had joined Rama on this side of the Indian ocean and made Rama's campaign an adventure of love for the Vanara soldiers. The armies marched and were posted under Rama's order. The Garuda strategy of posting armies outside the enemy's ramparts is in line with the vedic traditions in war, when military operations were directed to draw the enemy out of his forts as the Garuda drew out the serpents out of their covers.



The poet has his sympathies with the warriors on Rama's side, but he is not unjust to the warriors of the Rakshasa race. There is a man-to-man fight on every occasion and the stage is set for every good warrior to display his courage and art of fighting. There is a uniformity of design for all outstanding combats but a little feat of boldness on Vanara's side every time brings an unexpected weight to the words that keep pace with the excitement of the war. As every warrior in command of the Rakshasa armies brings with him a new technique of war, so every Vanara chief that engages him strikes a new note of wonder through every courageous move in the face of odds. The interest in the day-to-day fighting is maintained by the victory on the hero's side.

Though victory on Rama's side is taken for granted there are moments of suspense and serious upsets on this side. Lanka is a breeding place of war-like chiefs whose glories in the past had given them a place among generals of the community of races beyond the Indian coasts. The poet has brought to the stage of the war-front all the meritorious personalities that had contributed to the supremacy of the Rakshasa-race in the South. Some are giants in strength, while others are matchless in arms. Every new chief of the Rakshasas had deserved the poet's tribute, while Indrajit, Kumbhakarna and Ravana stand above the hosts of Vanaras and the Rakshasas, in their unique display of strategy, giant-strength and the chivalric spirit respectively.

Indrajit's magical sacrifice in the temple of Nikumbhala to make himself invincible is symbolic of the monstrous ambitions that war injects in the lusty war-mongers. Vibhishana's role in guiding Lakshmana to the place of Indrajit's mysterious preparations is akin to some compassionate action of Nemesis who always entraps cold-blooded perpetrators of crime before these can succeed in their diabolical designs. Indrajit's charges of traitorship against Vibhishana speaks well of the poet's objective study of his favourite characters. The poet's justification of Vibhishana's conduct and his place among Rama's counsellors is confirmed in the bloody combat between Lakshmana and Indrajit, wherein Indrajit is slain.

Kumbhakarna's place is unique in this war epic. The great giant measuring six hundred meters in height and one hundred meters

in roundness is a strange piece of life which marks the peak of gigantic sizes among monsters recorded in the *Ramayana*. Vibhishana's advice to Rama to declare to the Vanaras that this giant was only a mechanical device contrived by Ravana for frightening them, is a significant note by the poet to whom this giant was a ghost of war and when maddened with the excitement of war moved blindly against friend and foe. He is rapacity in corporeal form. The poet records his protest against war through this character who was an unwilling participant in war on Ravana's side. Masses are driven to war, rather than their joining it. Right or wrong, the cause of war is always endorsed by those who share the sense of pride, honour, kinship, racialism and nationalism inherited by the community. It is touching to see this super-giant shedding a tear of compassion for Vibhishana. Pangs of remorse for having fought against noble Rama agitate this rock-piece of life, whose slumbers are broken only for a day in a half year's time. He is sloth out of which all wars usually arise. Every inch of this ghost of war serves as the weapon of destruction. His legs fight, when his arms are cut off; the trunk falls to crush thousands under its mass. This is all that blind war should have represented to a poet who lived in an age of chivalry. Kumbhakarna fights only as a valiant soldier. His acceptance of Ravana's cause is a matter of honour and racial pride for him, though he is not blind to the fact that safety for the race lay in Vibhishana's choice of the righteous side. The giant is the poet's mouth-piece for giving vent to his feelings against war. In an age, when glories of war were regarded as glories of the first rank, a poet should have only waited for an opportunity to leave for the coming generations, his sincerest protest against war. To appreciate this symbol, we have to weigh the poet's reluctance of being so discovered in a weaker note of caution. Indeed he had not let an occasion slip under his pen without striking that cautioning note. His lamentation-scenes, in the wailings of Tara on Bali's death, and of Rama on Lakshmana's being injured mark the poet's brooding on the tale of woe arising out of an excitement of war. In searching for this symbol the poet was fully conscious that the war-like race for whom he was writing could not catch the agony of his heart through these lamentations.

The poet has reserved his choicest appreciation for the combat between Rama and Ravana. Ravana fights valiantly, though he is desperate. He is a marksman and his agility gives no breathing space to the Vanaras. Even Lakshmana had to suffer nearly a fatal blow for challenging Ravana in a little unguarded manner. The poet discovers in this glorious self-seeker a chaotic defiance of life itself. His reckless choice of war as a means of self-assertion uncovered a hidden sense of frustration in the whole community, allowed to reap a harvest of power and luxury under his giant protection. In his last moments, Ravana looks more like an effigy than a conscious war-like personality. Death that had been haunting him since he had kidnapped Sita, now overrides him, and the poet brings this striking feature of his desperation in an idiom fit for the monsters. Ravana is losing head after head when Rama's hissing arrows enter the giant's frame with flashing sparks, so that in his valiant surrender to the consequences of his own actions, he looks like a beast anointed as a victim of sacrifice rather than a worthy adversary of Rama.

Rama alone could be a match for this giant, for in Rama's personality was embodied the experience and strength of a nation which claimed knowledge of arms as a part of spiritual heritage. The vedic seers like Vishvamitra, Sutikshna and Agastya had infused in Rama their spiritual affirmation of the necessity of war as a means of protecting humanity against monster-evil.

The fight between Rama and Ravana remains an event by itself in this war epic. The unarmed Vanaras had indeed fought well against marksmen of Lanka, and Kumbhakarna had beaten a touching rhythm of regret while surrendering every inch of his imposing stature to Rama's arrows. Sugriva, Angada, Hanuman and others had their share in giving and receiving blows that produced sparks from their stone ribs. Hanuman by himself had claimed victory over some great warriors besides having killed countless warriors every day from among the rank and file of the hosts from Lanka. But, when Ravana marched to the field, spirits of the Asuras thronged in the space above to watch this champion, while Devas watched breathlessly the issue of the battle. A poet could coin no better words than those which marked the battle as without parallel elsewhere. The hero who had

killed thousands of warriors in a few hours in the Dandaka forest, and who had in a couple of hours showered death on millions of the Rakshasas the day before Ravana marched to the battle, had brought into play only a part of his war-personality on these previous occasions. It was on confronting Ravana that Rama mustered the whole of his martial personality for a concentrated action. Grimness of the combat, seen in the perspective of easier triumphs in the past, makes Rama's victory over Ravana an event by itself.



### III

## DIVINE INTERFERENCE

The last cantos of the Yuddha Kanda are dedicated to the consecration of Rama's personality. Words were inadequate to describe Rama in action and the artist who had so sternly kept his muse engaged within human bounds, while singing of the charms of his hero's personality, allows her to escape to celestial altitudes for pouring down an unrestrained praise on his hero, as soon as the hero comes out victorious from the last greatest combat of his life. Brahma, the Creator, Indra, the chief of gods, and, above all, Maheshwara, the Supreme Divinity, come to point out the Infinite in Rama's personality. Dasharatha's spirit, too, comes down from its heavenly abode to bless Rama who has raised the status of man above gods. The opportune moment has come for Rama to modestly deny what all had been eager to confirm, namely his incarnation-status. There is an art in the poet's artlessness in invoking Rama as Vishnu, the Deity, who is beyond time and space, and in whom all creatures have their birth, and in whom these creatures merge after having lived their allotted span.

From the beginning, the poet had left it to gods and seers to talk of the Divinity in Rama. From the moment of Sita's abduction by Ravana, this implicit notion had often been vehemently cherished by gods and seers who anxiously guided Rama and watched his interests. The ocean, the mount Mainaka, the guardian spirit of Lanka, had from time to time voiced what the last scene confirms. Ravana's fears that Rama was Narayana were well supported by his convictions. Mandodari's laments had only harped on the same theme. Yet it remained a credit to Valmiki to keep his conviction in deference to the dictates of his art and let these voices go adrift in the human theme of his poem. Dignity of conception commanded Valmiki to hold aloft his hero's personality through the hero's actions. After this last achievement

of his hero, the poet watched a little more closely the character whom he had followed from the cradle to this great victory, and was obliged to believe with others that eternity did look out through the eyes of the hero for whom he had hardly been able to find words fit, but few. Valmiki's appreciation for his hero was akin to Shakespeare's feelings expressed in the latter's sonnet:

I see their antique pen would have exprest  
 Even such a beauty as you master now.  
 So all their praises are but prophecies  
 Of this our time, all you prefiguring  
 And for they looked but with divining eyes,  
 They had not skill enough your worth to sing;  
 For which now behold these present days  
 Have eyes to wonder but lack tongues to speak.

Very rarely had been a loving woman so rescued from the head of a confederacy of world's monstrous powers. To a poet, Rama who had done this unique act, should indeed have looked as the Supreme Man, or the Purusha, out of whom all men receive their fractions of manhood or 'Purushatva'. In the Rig Veda, this Purusha is rightly honoured as the Man with a thousand heads, thousand eyes and a thousand feet comprising all humanity and yet more than this. The stage for gods as a poetic design is also another form of 'Bharata Vakya' which marks the close of an Indian drama. This 'Bharata Vakya', or the blessing on the stage, invokes gods to bless mankind in general. Maheshwara's advice to Rama to accept Sita and to return to Ayodhya is a blessing to that purpose, for Rama was capable of doing all good to mankind and for years be known for charity. In the language of the vedic age, Rama was to perform an Ashvamedha and was to give millions of cows to those who had dedicated their lives to the cause of knowledge.

The poet was also a thinker for his age. In his poetic justice, we should see justice that is eternal, and in Rama's winning back of Sita, we should see a reassertion of some perennial values of life. The last scene of the divine interference once again invites us to have a peep into the poet's mind.

Ravana had performed sacrifices in the vedic manner. His glorious empire in the south was a tribute to his penances or self-discipline. He had been granted boons by the Creator and

he had propitiated Shankara. All this, in a quaint idiom, speaks of his virtuous life in the past. Even in the days of Hanuman's visit to Lanka, recitation of the vedas in the morning was a regular feature in Ravana's palaces and in other homes. Hanuman's fears that if he spoke in the vedic language, Sita would suspect him to be Ravana in disguise is quite a significant remark about the language that Ravana claimed as his accomplishment. The spiritual values in Lanka were not different from the spiritual values in Northern India, and more than once Ravana was reminded of his birth in a family of vedic seers. If he had desisted from doing violence to Sita, or from torture to Hanuman, it was due to his unwillingness to renounce all claims of association with the vedic studies. All these facts undoubtedly speak of some common spiritual links between Lanka of Ravana, and India of Rama's days.

Ravana's patronage of cannibal tribes represented by Maricha, Tadaka, Khara, Dushana and Shurpanakha was another step downward from civilisation to barbarism on his part. To understand the poet's view of Ravana's personality, we should not ignore a few stray remarks by the two cannibals, Viradha and Kabandha. After their deliverance by Rama, these monsters declared that they had been monsters under Kubera's curses. Ravana is represented as Kubera's brother who had forcibly possessed Lanka founded by the divine architect for Kubera. There is indeed some clue here to Ravana's personality. By dint of courage, enterprise and self-discipline, Ravana had been victorious over Kubera, or he had won prosperity and wealth. Those who had suffered under Kubera's curse had been driven back to cannibalism and sheer sloth and poverty. Ravana's prosperity had encouraged this sloth, or in other words, his wealth had brought no good to larger humanity. This was indeed the monstrous element in his personality which was a concern of gods. When a powerful tyrant gathers under his patronage a few selfish monsters to assume an overbearing personality, voices that fain would render sound counsel for the good of humanity are silenced for fear or for indifference. When a huge section of humanity had been left to its own fate to carry on its existence in a state of unplanned structureless society, and when a powerful monarch under whose protection many powerful lords had carried on their barbaric authority over millions for their own

luxuries and indulgent ways of life, a vicious exploiting circle had been set up which self-seekers ever had been joining for their advantage. Society, which for selfishness or for fear lends a support to such bulwarks of tyranny for long gradually sinks into sloth and then right ceases to appear as right and wrong ceases to stir crowds of people to right action. Kumbhakarna is a fine character to represent this state of society. His arguments were sound and his regard for the righteous was deep-rooted in him. He appreciated Vibhishana's nobler thinking. He held Rama in high esteem and boldly condemns Ravana's slighting remarks against Rama. Kumbhakarna prefers slumbering over this state of affairs.

Others had gone ahead and not only supported Ravana but cajoled him to start on a more aggressive way of life. This was then the state of society against which gods, who in vedic idiom stand for glorious ways of human life, stand helpless. This explains Ravana's feud against gods, and this again explains the disturbance that he caused or encouraged in nearly-accomplished sacrifices in the sages' ashramas. A yajna or a sacrifice in the vedic idiom means a well-planned lay-out for the good of humanity, and it was against such programmes of the seers that Ravana's protégés had been carrying on their successful expeditions. Ravana, too, had performed such sacrifices in the past, but power had now corrupted him beyond recovery, and he was bequeathing to society a more selfish way of life than he himself had resorted to. His son Indrajit now performed sacrifices for meaner purposes, and Valmiki gives a significant symbol for all diabolical deals that a backward society works for. Indrajit's ladle was made of black iron, his clothes were red and he offered oblations of blood and liquor.

Who could redeem such a society? Man had contributed to this long deterioration. Man gifted with pure actions, intellect and vision alone could effect man's deliverance from this sloth. Rama was indeed this man, in whom gods saw the 'Primaeval purpose of Creation'. Yet, Rama saw facts impartially, as the sun and the moon see in their heavenly journeys. He acted as purely as the wind that blows freely as it likes. The vedic idiom once more defines such a man who identifies himself with the entire creation. In Purusha-Sukta of the Rig Veda, when Purusha or the Primaeval man performed the eternal sacrifice, Spring became the clari-

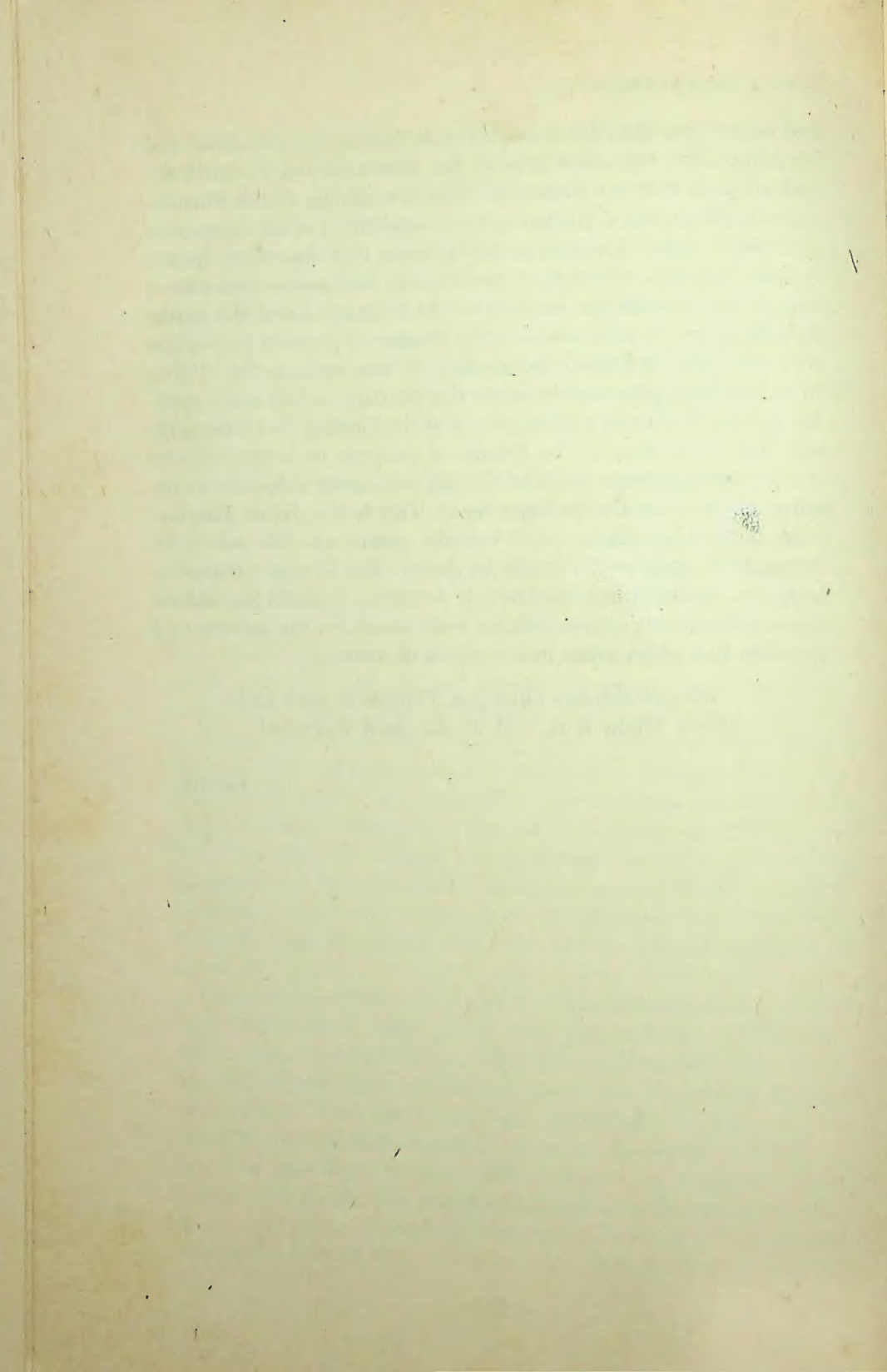


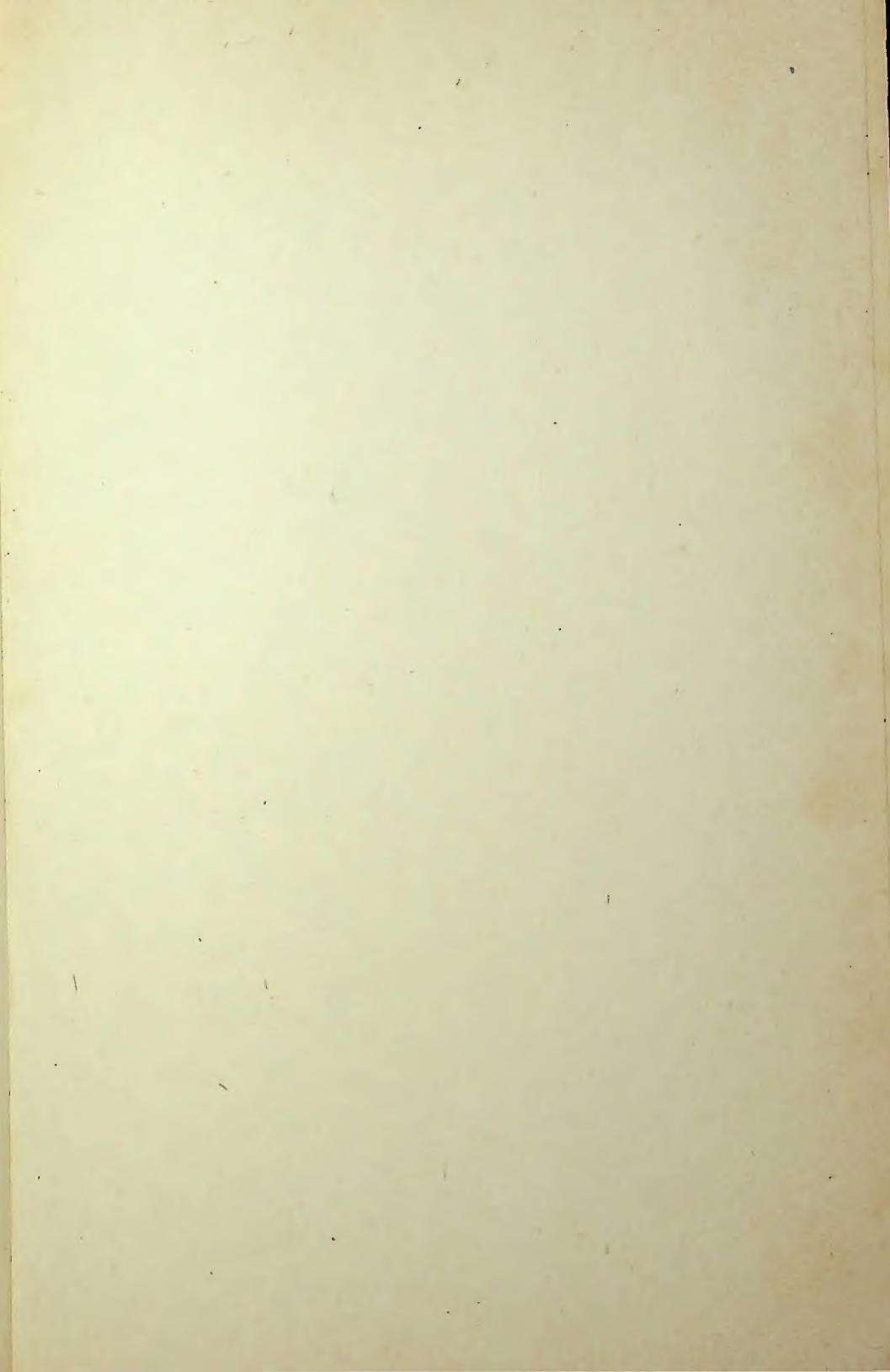
## DIVINE INTERFERENCE

fied butter, Summer the fire-sticks and Autumn the oblations, and his personality expanded into all the creatures that live and die and all gods that are immortal. This description of the Purusha sums up all notions of the perfect man, and when in the *Ramayana* gods adore Rama as Vishnu or the Supreme Purusha, whose breath is the wind, and whose eyes are the sun and moon, and whose ears are Ashvins or the cavities of the firmament and the earth, Valmiki means to point out that the Primaeval purpose of creation was embodied in Rama's personality. It was, in fact, the Mighty Man that had given to the seers the concept of the vedic gods. For the birth of such a Man, gods and the Creator had long waited. This reassertion of the Primaeval purpose in human society is a periodic phenomenon and though we cannot calculate its occurrence, we can always hope for it. This is the divine interference in human affairs, and Valmiki meant all this when he brought all gods on the stage to declare the Divine personality of Rama. By revealing this Divinity in Rama, Valmiki has indeed immortalised his poem which for ever stands as the answer to a question that often arises in the minds of men:

“Who establishes Olympus, Peoples it with gods  
Man's Might it is, and in the Bard Revealed.”

— Goethe









### THE AUTHOR

Born in January 1916, Dr. Trikha received his education in Hindu College, Amritsar, and Forman Christian College, Lahore. After doing his M.A. in English in 1939, he joined the Hindu College, Amritsar in 1940 and was content to work in his home town there till his retirement in 1976 as the Head of the English Department. From the beginning, he was interested in the sacred literature of Ancient India. In his quest after knowledge, he did his M.A. in Sanskrit in 1945. In 1950, he was awarded Ph.D. in Sanskrit for his research on Turiya or Transcendence.

Dr. Trikha carried on research work quite independently and from time to time contributed articles on the various lores of Ancient India. His first book **Guru Nanak as the National Saint of India** was well received. Dr. Trikha's "**The Rig Veda, A Scientific and Intellectual Analysis of The Hymns**" has recently been published by Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., Bombay.